
by

Suzanne Pauline Scott

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Adult Education, Community Development and Counseling Psychology
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT


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Suzanne Pauline Scott, Department of Adult Education, Community Development and Counseling Psychology. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.

This thesis analyzes the schools project for child garment workers under the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by the International Labour Organization, UNICEF, and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association. The MOU schools project is viewed as an example of a model towards the gradual elimination of child labour within a broader structure of national and international actors involved in child rights issues.

In this thesis, the MOU schools are evaluated by members of the drafting and final agreement committees and the respective critics considering the main research question of whether this program is a workable solution towards educating child garment workers. The central argument is that the program will work if: i) the anthropological considerations of childhood are considered, ii) an understanding of the complex political economy of child labour in the garment industry is undertaken, and iii) human rights concerns are addressed.
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For sustaining my body and soul I’d like to thank the Scott family, my mother Carolyn, and my brother Matthew: we have each been touched by our experiences in Bangladesh. In particular, I thank my father Dr. Jon J. Scott for his enthusiasm for my work. For his reassuring patience I am especially grateful to Dr. Todd Tomita.
“It's not armaments, but garments I want on people's naked bodies; Not hunger, but nectar I want for people's withered hearts; not drums, but crumbs I want in scarcity's drab cottages.
I want a house worth living in on my soil and the certainty of living until death.
It's not begging I want for oppressed, orphaned lives; not a needy, but a healthy child I want in every tortured home.”

from Believing Hands
in The Game in Reverse by Taslima Nasrin, 1995

“The truth is that the polis ... is an aggregate of many members; and education is the means of making it a community and giving it unity.”

Aristotle, Politics, Chapter V, p. 15
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INTRODUCTION

The Topic

This thesis is the direct result of eleven weeks of research in Dhaka, Bangladesh in June-August 1996 during which time I interned in the Education Section at UNICEF- Bangladesh. There is, however, a longer background to my interest in Bangladesh and child labour. From 1993-1996, I visited Bangladesh four times, and deepened my understanding of UNICEF’s work regarding educating child garment workers on each occasion. During the summer of 1995 I worked on contract for UNICEF-Bangladesh writing speeches on the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and developing funding proposals to raise the awareness of the Government of Bangladesh to the UNCRC and to highlight the concern of donors regarding the plight of working children. It was my experience working for UNICEF in Bangladesh, and the tremendous world interest in child labour which drew me to examine further the plight of working children in the garment industry. I had the opportunity to visit a number of garment factories and informally interview the supervisors and buyers. After returning to Canada to pursue a Master of Arts degree in the area of Comparative International Development Education, I decided to undertake the study of child labour and education in Bangladesh.

In this thesis I have focused on the work of a school program for children under the age of fourteen who were employed in the licensed garment factories of
the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, hereafter referred to as the BGMEA. The school programs are the result of three years of negotiations involving the International Labour Organization (ILO), UNICEF, and the BGMEA, which culminated in the signing on July 4th, 1995 of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) witnessed by the United States Embassy and Bangladeshi Ministerial staff from the Departments of Labour and Manpower, and of Foreign Affairs. The Memorandum of Understanding allows for an educational project and stipend disbursement program to be established to aid in the gradual elimination of child labour in the garment industry.

Although this thesis focuses on the MOU school program implemented by two large Bangladeshi non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and the Gonoshahajjo Sangstha Association (GSS), its main purpose is to provide a framework for the further exploration of education for child workers. This is, therefore, a working document which traces the progress made so far by the MOU schools. Two kinds of analyses are provided in this thesis. The first component addresses the contextual, historical, and economic complexities of child labour in Bangladesh: how it is defined and how it has become a problem issue. The second part of the research involves an analysis of interviews and participant observations conducted at the early stages of the attempts to negotiate a solution to the problem of child labour in the formal garment sector.

The MOU negotiation process itself is traced with particular emphasis on the
United States legislation called the Harkin Bill, named after Senator Harkin, which served as a catalyst for the MOU schools project, together with the tremendous progressive influence of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Bangladesh was one of the first twenty-two signatories to the Convention; surprisingly, the United States remains one of the few non-signatory nations. The UNCRC and the Harkin Bill constitute both the necessary preconditions, and the blueprints for the Memorandum of Understanding.

The MOU addresses a human rights issue in general and children's rights in particular. It is a remarkable agreement because it achieved consensus between actors and agencies which had not previously worked at all well together. The MOU has major implications for other human rights concerns and for the gradual elimination of child labour in other sectors and possibly in other countries. However, such an achievement cannot be fully analyzed and appreciated unless the delicate balance of the major actors and their viewpoints is understood. One cannot dismiss any of the major players and their motivation as they are arguably all playing significant roles in maintaining the MOU schools project.

The contextual setting is extremely important in order to understand the issue of child labour in Bangladesh. The thesis explores the varied cultural understandings and internationally used definitions of 'child' and 'labour', the economic and social importance of the garment industry to Bangladesh, and the influences - both positive and negative - of the MOU project on the movement towards the elimination of child labour. It analyzes the value of such a program by
highlighting the main themes, assumptions and arguments relating to the discussion of implementing an educational program for child garment workers. The thesis looks more at the politics of education for children in the garment industry than at curriculum-based needs for these working children.

Given that the roles of large organizations are changing globally and that a new management doctrine has sought to maximize available resources by identifying new private sector resources, the changing role of international development agencies also serves as a contextual background. The globalization of the world economy and inter-governmental organizations are forcing rapid change upon the international development community. Rather than simply providing technical assistance, organizations such as UNICEF are becoming advocates for social transformation, generating new movements instead of leading old ones. This transitional phase for UNICEF affects its organizational position on the issue of education for child labourers.

**Background to Interest in Thesis Topic**

As a result of my experience living in South East Asia as a child, I had an early exposure to the diverse cultural and class understandings of Western and East Asian conceptions of childhood and children. The discrepancies of income levels and the extreme levels of poverty were something that even as a young girl, I questioned. My first visit to Bangladesh in 1994 coincided with my acceptance to
teach English in Fukuoka Prefecture in Japan, as a participant in the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET). It was from Japan that I made my first visit to Bangladesh. Only six hours plane journey within the same geographic region of South East Asia brought me into a whole other world. Over the course of the next three years I visited Bangladesh on three separate occasions, becoming more and more intrigued with the possibility of working for the NGO community in the area of child labour and education. Only gradually did I realize that non-formal primary education (NFPE) for child labourers was part of a much larger problem of international trade affecting the largest export sector in Bangladesh and the import policies of the United States.

My continued interest in the field of NFPE was because of a profoundly moving experience I had whilst visiting a BRAC rural school in 1994. I recall the heat, the intense humidity and the sounds. I had walked through a small Northern Hindu village to visit a school for the children of this rural community. The school was made of bamboo walls and a corrugated iron roof. There were roughly 30 students with girls making up most of the pupils. The children of the village who were not in the class, peered in from outside through holes in the bamboo walls. The light from outside and the limited breeze was obstructed by countless children’s heads poking into the classroom, eager to join in the learning. And then they sang. The singing was harsh and anxious, a full throttled sound. It was so unlike anything I had ever heard that I was really moved. Their eagerness to learn, the girls’ demands for us to stay and watch more dancing and hear songs and games was
astonishing. In exchange for their songs, we sang a wilting rendition of "If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands" complete with a pathetic display of flailing arms and stomping feet.

In any case, the main focus of my work on child labour related to the first ever Conference on the United Convention on the Rights of the Child in Dhaka, in June 1995. I was hired on contract by UNICEF Bangladesh to write the opening and closing speeches for the UNICEF Country Representative. To make a long story short, I learned a great deal about the UNCRC and how it is applied to children's rights in Bangladesh. It was a tremendous learning experience and if I was not already smitten by phenomenal attempts by BRAC and other indigenous NGOs to improve the lot of children, I was soon convinced that this is where my academic interests would lie.

In September of that year I started my Master of Arts program in Comparative International Development Education (CIDEC) at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto and found that Dr. Joseph Farrell, the Head of CIDEC, was also very interested in the BRAC NFPE schools. He encouraged me to pursue my interests in development education through the NFPE network. The course work and my plans for the thesis research blended well and I wrote a number of term papers on the non-formal education movement in Columbia, the Escuela Nueva, and the Community Girls School Projects in Upper Egypt.
Overview of the Thesis

The initial aim of this thesis was to study a single education program for child garment workers and interview the parents, students and teacher groups in order to understand their need for education, and how they view the type of education they require. After consulting the Dhaka UNICEF information base, I found that a similar study had been conducted by Dr. Bert Pelto in 1994 and that an adequate amount of qualitative data was available in this area. I then turned to examining a cross-section, a "slice of life," from the MOU schools project by formally consulting the key decision-makers in the MOU negotiation process. The qualitative data I collected stems from interviews with Bangladeshi nationals involved in the ILO, UNICEF, BGMEA, the Ministry of Education, BRAC, and the other NGO implementing agency - Gonoshahajjo Sangstha. I also interviewed a number of expatriate members of the MOU project from Canada, the United States, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Nepal. As this program remains "in progress" and "under construction," many operational issues remain unresolved, principal among them of course the complex of concerns about the future of its sustainability, i.e. financial viability.

In the interviews, I asked the key participants in the MOU schools project to identify the principal elements of a workable program to educate child garment workers. I asked them for an evaluation of their work and an assessment of the program using interview questions which entailed indirect reviews of their work.
What I have, then, is a case study evaluation of a work in progress. These questions were generated during my first few weeks of internship in the education section at UNICEF Bangladesh, between June and August 1996. (See Appendix C). During this period, the MOU schools were in the early stages of development and implementation, and were being received with mixed feelings by the NGO community, the private sector and the Bangladeshi government.

The goal of the research was to understand what factors led to the introduction of the MOU schools project and how the members of the MOU decision-making process were motivated to move the MOU negotiation process forward into stages of actual implementation. The interviews attempted to glean a general view of the participants' reflections on child labour as a human rights issue and how the implementation of the MOU would affect the future child labour debate. The assumptions were that there would be differences in the participants' motivations to be members in the MOU process. Based on these assumptions, I wanted to analyze the data for areas and themes which may have affected the active negotiation process. The most apparent patterns of these themes would aid in the full understanding of the implementation of such a distinctive human rights agreement.

I was particularly concerned to discover whether the MOU was addressing a public relations issue, and not the real problems of child labourers. In addition, the apparent lack of the Bangladesh government's interest and direct support of the MOU was needed to be questioned. The works of Blanchet, Bissell and Sobhan,
Alston and Heissler aided me in my groundwork and confirmed my awareness of the need for a multi-disciplinary approach to the study of child labour. Despite the literature available on childhood in Bangladesh, child labour in the garment sector and the principles of children's rights, there were no real studies on the MOU process or how the members in the MOU negotiation process felt about such an agreement.

Some of the assumptions which led up to the formation of my research questions included my doubt that not all the partners in the MOU negotiation process were equally motivated to pursue such a noble attempt to combat child labour and that there was a greater political rationale playing a role in encouraging the BGMEA to become partners. I also assumed that the socio-cultural differences among the MOU project participants would result in diverse interpretations of the value of children and childhood and thereby affect the best way to implement this program. I chose to interview mostly the middle-management staff involved in the process in order to get a more balanced view of the process and implementation.

The interview questions set the initial structure of the research by asking the participants to describe the outline of their work; their official responsibilities, self-motivation and self-assessment of their work, assessment and motivation of other partners, assessment of the project as a whole, and the international ramifications of the project. Other topics related to my research included the political economy of child labour, the politics of education, aid dependency and its effect on the funding of education, United Nations Conventions on children's rights, cultural perceptions
of childhood, and the different management styles of the participating MOU partners.

One of the major issues I encountered was a discussion of a "rights-based" approach to development, that seems to be emerging in Bangladesh. I see this as a most welcome and challenging development. A discussion of rights as a "Northern" conception versus the universal application of what we may call duties or obligations towards children comes mainly from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and UNICEF's new advocacy role. Such a discussion involves an understanding of the "best interests" principle in the UNCRC and the cultural differences embedded in government policies towards children, for example, which types of children "count" in Bangladesh and which do not, and how this is exemplified every day in society's treatment of children.

The issue of child labour in Bangladesh is extremely controversial and involves complex relationships of political and economic interests. In the end, products made by child workers are purchased in large numbers by foreign buyers, including Canadian consumers. But complexity involves determining meaningful truths from purposeful deceptions, and I was often faced with difficult decisions as to whom to believe and with whom to side. What I have found is that child labour and the discussions which ensue prove that we are all still learning a great deal about how it works and which stake-holders have more of a "rights based" understanding of child labour than others.

There are a number of complicated sub-themes involved in this research
which pits the protectionist interests of American trade unionists against Third World "entrepreneurs" who wish to try their luck at the textile and ready-made garment industry. There are fascinating developments involved in this area of the trade/aid debate and they will be briefly discussed. What I would like to do is present a work which shows the key debates emerging from a discussion of education for these children, exploring how the work in the field leads to real improvements in child labour conditions, as well as the shocking consequences of the mismanagement of the issue.

What childhood and labour mean in Bangladeshi society is the starting point for the thesis. There have been very few studies conducted on educational projects for children in the garment industry in the way presented in this thesis. Much of the critical analysis of this project has come from suggestions advanced and comments made by the participants interviewed in the preparation of this thesis. The program is still in its infancy and thus it has been difficult to present clear evidence either that these programs are doomed to failure or that they will lead to success. Yet I suggest that an understanding of the key elements in this MOU project may lead to a better understanding of the many factors, and illuminate the many layers of often contradictory relationships, which go into funding, measuring, and implementing school projects for children involved in such a visible and exploitative, export-driven industry.

The difficulties facing the MOU schools have been diagnosed in a variety of ways by my participants ranging from organizational problems, to the availability of
funding, to the psychological and attitudinal problems with respect to child labour faced by those in positions of authority. I remain convinced that the work of the MOU schools project can be shaped to work for the children and be gradually incorporated into a badly missing element in government educational programs. Urban working children cannot continue to be assumed to be the responsibility of the NGOs, for in order to improve basic education in Bangladesh, all children must be given the right encouragement to continue their education. As the common Bengali proverb says: "poverty of mind must first be done away with."

This thesis concentrates on analyzing and understanding the work of the MOU schools projects as a small player in a broader universe of national and international structures and actors. It is my hope that the analysis presented here will illuminate some of the places where essential changes are needed. This thesis is intended to encourage those working in the area of international comparative development education to look at their work with the knowledge that the MOU schools are helping to alleviate the child labour situation and yet to question, as I have done, the confused networking of power and the effect of new development approaches which shape and limit educational projects financed by bodies such as the ILO, UNICEF, and the BGMEA.

The Rationale

On December 23rd, 1996, the Globe and Mail featured an editorial entitled To
End Child Labour which discussed the devastating effect that the Harkin Bill had on the 50,000 child garment workers in Bangladesh estimated to have lost their jobs. This editorial underlined the negative effect which boycotts can have on children who labour. The MOU schools and stipend disbursement program was presented as a workable solution to the economic survival of working children. The central point made in this piece was that education must be provided specifically for these working children, on the basis that the more education a child has, the less likely he or she is to engage in hazardous employment. The fact that Canada’s “national newspaper” quoted the MOU schools project specifically, heralding it as a worthy alternative to boycotts is an example of how important the need is to communicate the effectiveness of the gradual introduction of such a school program as opposed to an all-out ban on products known to be manufactured by children.

Earlier in the year on February 26th, 1996, John Stackhouse of the Globe and Mail wrote an article entitled New Solutions Fashioned for Child Workers in which he profiled the Memorandum of Understanding in Bangladesh. It was discussed as a “model of how trade and aid, when combined thoughtfully, can force change... it could even build a bridge between two very different worlds: the development agencies that advocate child rights, and the private sector, which employs most of the world’s working children.” Despite the progress attributed to the MOU schools project, Stackhouse reminded us that the bottom line in a country like Bangladesh is that the garment-workers’ schools will touch only the surface of

Stackhouse, Globe and Mail, 1996
the child-labour problem.

The magnitude of the problem of working children is inherently incalculable, but a recent ILO survey indicated that 73 million of the world’s children are employed - equivalent to 13 per cent of those aged 10 to 14. The survey was limited because many national governments did not respond. It did not include children at work in industrialized countries, nor did it count the millions of child workers believed to be under 10 years of age, nor yet those employed in the informal sector, or attending school who might also be working. Nor did it include the biggest group of invisible workers: all those children - mainly girls - who are engaged in domestic labour, whether for their own families or as servants.²

Child labour is a complex issue. Powerful forces sustain it, including many employers, vested interest groups, free-market economists and traditionalists believing the caste or class of certain children denudes them of rights. Work can interfere with education in the following ways: by absorbing so much time that school attendance is impossible; by leaving the child too exhausted and lacking in energy to study effectively; and by undermining the value children themselves place on education. Education therefore, is one of the keys that will unlock the prison cell of the worst forms of hazardous labour in which so many children are confined. Education will help a child develop cognitively, emotionally and socially. It is impossible to overemphasize this point. The 1997 UNICEF State of the World’s Children Report states that basic primary education for all children is a keystone of

their rights and a condition for the exercise of other rights.³

According to the World Bank, the return on investment in education in low and middle-income countries is high - and still higher for primary schooling, compared to secondary or higher education. Thus, giving priority to education is not only a way of combating child labour, it is a sound economic investment. Primary education is the largest single contributor to the economic growth rates of the high-performing Asian economies. "The Republic of Korea invests one hundred and thirty dollars per person per year in basic education - Bangladesh invests just two dollars."⁴

Bangladesh is a fascinating country in many ways, but it is particularly remarkable for its indigenous NGO movements, notwithstanding the extremes in population density, poverty, and low literacy rates. Bangladeshi NGOs are active on all major development fronts. The movement towards the elimination of child labour from the garment sector is one such movement. Bangladesh is one of the world’s major garment exporters; the industry employs over a million workers, most of them women, and many of them children. In 1992, between 50,000 and 75,000 members of its workforce were children under the age of fourteen, mainly girls.⁵

Children engaged in employment with the garment industry were illegally employed according to the Bangladesh Factories Act of 1965, but the situation captured little attention nationally or internationally, until the garment factories

³ ibid
⁴ State of the World’s Children Report 1997, p.54
⁵ ibid, p.60
began to hide the children from foreign buyers, especially Americans, or else laid off
the children following the introduction of the Child Labour Deterrence Act of 1992
introduced by US Senator Harkin. When the bill was reintroduced in 1993, its
impact was devastating: garment employers dismissed an estimated 50,000 children
from their factories, approximately 75% of all children in the industry.⁶

It is as a result of this unhappy situation that the Memorandum of
Understanding was signed on July 4th, 1995 by the ILO, UNICEF, and the BGMEA.
As is stated in the 1997 State of the World’s Children Report, the jury is still out on
the long-term effectiveness of the MOU. One key issue is whether setting up special
schools for child workers and providing a package of incentives such as stipends and
skills development is a sustainable model that could be applied on a larger scale for
all child workers. Nevertheless, the events that led up to the Memorandum remain
critical to understanding its future. The actual existence of the MOU depends on the
balanced interaction of the key partners in the MOU negotiation process. If there is
any particular shift in this balance, for example in funding, then this will change the
actual basis of the agreement itself.

The education of child labourers in Bangladesh presents a complexity of facets
and cannot be looked at from only one perspective. The purpose of this thesis is to
identify this complex human rights issue and identify how such an issue evolves
into an agreement requiring constant negotiation. This kind of understanding
draws upon diverse frames of reference from anthropology, political economy, and

⁶ ibid
moral philosophy. Unless one looks at the MOU project from as many perspectives as possible, one cannot see where it is going. The MOU may appear to be successful from one perspective, but one reason alone is not the whole truth. Only through striving to achieve a multi-faceted perspective can one understand the complexity of the attempts to achieve a realistic practical outcome. Given its complexity, the MOU is already a success.

The Organization of the Thesis

This thesis was written over the course of six months from October 1996 to April 1997, when I was a volunteer with UNICEF-Canada and completing my course work for my Master of Arts degree in Comparative, International, and Development Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) of the University of Toronto.

Chapter One introduces the structural methodology and analysis of this thesis drawing on the works of major qualitative researchers including; Popkewitz, Lincoln and Guba, Strauss and Corbin, and Kirby and Mc Kenna. My research is described in detail, validating my approach. The interview questions are outlined and any biases and limitations of this research methodology and the analysis process are explained.

Chapter Two sets the stage for the MOU schools project by including a “Bangladeshi-specific” introduction to the various meanings and interpretations of
childhood and labour. The authors whose works I cite have all used critical approaches to the study of education, international assistance to educational aid, international development, and children’s rights issues. This chapter examines; i) Bangladeshi meanings and interpretations of childhood and labour through an anthropological examination of the Bangladeshi society, class structure and samaj, and ii) the politicization of education with particular emphasis on the limitations of the Bangladeshi formal education system.

In Chapter Three the root causes of child labour are analyzed: these include rural-urban migration; slum housing conditions; cheap labour; and the political economy of Bangladesh with respect to the importance of the garment sector and its dependence on US markets. The fact that there are very few alternatives for these working children is underlined. The role of the BGMEA as an active participant in private sector trade/aid initiatives is evaluated.

Chapter Four examines The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the “best interests” principle. The role of the Government of Bangladesh in participating in the rights-based argument for children’s access to education is highlighted. Of prime importance is the cultural relativism versus universalism debate with respect to the UNCRC and its application in Bangladesh in the form of the Memorandum of Understanding.

In Chapter Five, the focus is on the Memorandum of Understanding and the political negotiation which transpired in the process to reach an agreement. A brief history is given of the MOU schools project, building on the inconsistencies in the
objectives and goals of this project. I argue that current problems have arisen from
the varying and contradictory views about the purpose of the MOU schools,
representing a confusion of whose "best interests" are being served, those of the
children, those of the Bangladeshi garment manufacturers, or those of US trade
unionists. I show that the MOU schools project seems likely to meet the policy
objectives as set out in the apparent transparency of the actual MOU document,
while seriously neglecting the issue of poor planning and implementation
objectives, felt particularly by those at the grass-roots implementation level. The
role of the Harkin Bill in speeding up the MOU Schools project is illustrated.

**Chapter Six** deals with the reflections of my interviewees and their
perspectives on the MOU schools project. I systematically analyze the data procured
from my participants and reflect the differences of opinion of the key players. The
key themes include; the diverse anthropological conceptions of childhood, the
political economy of child labour in the garment industry, inter-agency conflict in
the MOU process, discrepancy in the management of the MOU and issues of the
program's financial sustainability. The thesis concludes in **Chapter Seven** with a
summary of conclusions reached, and an identification of those factors which are
essential to continued growth and development of this program on a self-sustaining
basis.
CHAPTER ONE

The Research: Methodology & Analysis

"You don’t exactly penetrate another culture, as the masculinist image would have it. You put yourself in its way and it embodies forth and enmeshes you."

Geertz, 1995, p. 44

A. Research Methodology

In order to produce valid research, an effort was made to gather both qualitative and quantitative data on the child labour education issue. During my internship with UNICEF-Bangladesh, I had the opportunity to participate in and observe the operation of the MOU schools projects, and to have extensive discussions with professionals in the field of education and child labour. The major research component comprises an extensive review of literature on child labour and a series of in-depth interviews conducted with the key players involved in and related to the MOU negotiation process.

To complement this field experience, the research has included the study of reports from UNICEF, The World Bank, The Asian Development Bank, the ILO and BRAC, as well as papers by Bangladeshi academics on subjects ranging from the societal effects of the garment industry on women and children, to profiles of the new entrepreneurial class in the Bangladeshi garment sector. I was privy to official files on the MOU in the Education section at UNICEF Bangladesh and read
numerous articles on working children from the UNICEF library; these included reports, papers, minutes from MOU Steering Committee meetings, and MOU school visit reports, not all of which have been separately noted in the bibliography. In addition, the research process included field visits to five MOU schools run by BRAC and CSS in Dhaka and three such schools in Chittagong, the second largest city in Bangladesh. In Chittagong I observed the disbursements of stipends at three MOU schools and talked informally (through my colleagues at UNICEF as translators) to the teachers, parents, and children involved in the MOU schools. I kept extensive fieldnotes of my experience visiting schools, factories and attending meetings. These notes are organized in three volumes of journal entries; June 1996, July 1996, and August 1996.

A variety of scholarly sources helped me construct the basic theoretical framework for the thesis. These include works in the field of Comparative International and Development Education, and from such diverse fields as International Relations, Political and Moral Philosophy, Political Economy, Social Anthropology, and Sociology. This array of sources exemplifies the complex, multi-disciplinary nature of the study of child labour and education.

At the onset, I examined reviews of literature based on similar studies, perused policy-oriented publications to learn about current or emerging issues in the field, and discussed my research interests with two child labour experts, Mr. Bill Myers and Mr. Alec Fyfe who overlapped with my stay in Dhaka at UNICEF. As part of my internship, I attended three ILO monitoring visits to garment factories in
Dhaka and spoke with the owners, factory supervisors and child workers. Talking to the children and observing their treatment by the factory supervisors led me to inquire into the physical abuse and possible sexual exploitation of child garment workers. I was able to make two unrelated visits to brothels in Dhaka accompanied by two Salvation Army workers to speak to fourteen women who as young girls worked in garment factories in Dhaka and who had been seriously sexually exploited so as to turn to brothel life.

In my capacity as UNICEF intern, I attended as many meetings as possible held by the MOU working group on the topic of improving momentum for the MOU schools project. These meetings were attended by the Bangladeshi members of the ILO verification and monitoring teams, BRAC and GSS field workers, and representatives from the BGMEA and UNICEF. These environments gave my research the added validity of involving participant observation techniques. In this manner I was able to identify which participants might be the most forthcoming and articulate their concerns regarding the MOU. It was through participation in these meetings, and in the life of the Education section at UNICEF, that I was able to choose my interview candidates.

1.1 Theoretical Approach

Egon Guba’s The Paradigm Dialog was helpful in enabling me to determine where my theoretical approach lies in response to my ontological, epistemological,
and methodological attempts at answering the question of how to research an educational project for child garment workers. My research has focused on educational problems as part of the social, political, and economic patterns by which schooling is formed and thus fits into the critical theory paradigm, as expanded by Popkewitz (1990). My ontological claims are those of a critical realist and my epistemology is subjectivist in its approach. My methodology is transformative and aimed at eliminating false consciousness. My research gives reference to a systematic inquiry, *Wissenschaft* or scholarship that focuses on the contradictions of educational practice.

Popkewitz describes a critical science as having two meanings. First, he identifies internal criticisms as emerging from the analytical questioning of argument and method. Differences in presentation can be explained by the "nature" of the problem being studied and the data that each discipline considers. The second meaning can be drawn from these differences to reformulate the issue of logic. Logic involves particular forms of reasoning that "give focus toward social institutions and a conception of reality that ties ideas, thought, and language to social and historical conditions."¹ As this tradition of critical science is carried into educational research, its purpose is to examine the conflict and tensions of schooling as a socially constructed institution. Schooling is viewed in this thesis as an institution "whose pedagogy and patterns of conduct are continually related to larger issues of social production and reproduction."²

¹ Popkewitz, 1990, p.46
² ibid
A critical science then, according to Popkewitz, is concerned with ways in which social, cultural, and economic conditions produce a certain selectivity in the processes of teaching and the organization of curriculum. It involves a "continual skepticism toward the commonplace and socially accepted conventions of schooling, realizing that social practices contain contradictions in which there are continually unresolved issues of power domination." Thus, one of the many factors related to child labour and education which this thesis examines is the relations of the conditions and organization of schooling, as continually bound to processes of production and reproduction in society.

The data which I have collected from the seventeen participants is important to scientific practices of educational research, but it would be erroneous to situate them in a context devoid of the problems of study or the concepts that are employed in research. As Popkewitz states "the history of science has provided strong evidence that the procedures of interviews, or observation techniques do not stand alone but are part of a matrix of curiosities, questions, and social practices that, in their entirety, constitute the scientific enterprise." Methodology, in this context, is concerned with the relations of the various parts of the study with the production of findings. It is concerned with the moral order (the rules, values, and priorities given to social conditions and individual action) presupposed in the practices of science. "It is the study of what is defined as legitimate knowledge and how that knowledge is obtained and defined."
1.2 Research Design

This thesis project is a combination of a case study and an evaluation of the MOU schools project. It has involved exploratory qualitative research which looks at the work of a single education project providing basic education for child labourers in the garment industry. It is not intended to prove or test a theory so much as to identify and investigate the complex factors which shape and limit the implementation of education for children engaged as employees in the ready-made garment industry. Although many factors are unique to Bangladesh, the study nonetheless responds to the solid scientific basis of qualitative and quantitative information on child labour, in the general arenas of politics, economics and sociology.

I attended many meetings representing the middle management and operational aspects of the MOU, and as an intern with UNICEF I became fully immersed in the centre circle of those who had developed the MOU schools program. Once a trust factor had developed amongst us, I decided to contact the key participants in the MOU negotiation process to ask for their opinions on the decision-making process and the subsequent implementation of the MOU schools. I was interested in finding out if the MOU was the embodiment of humanitarian concern for working children or whether it was purely a public relations scheme set-up to protect the export industries of Bangladesh and labour interests in the USA. I chose seventeen participants from the different interest groups at the middle-
management position so as to get as representative a sample as possible. I interviewed the participants in their own offices and in most cases I met with them twice, once to introduce my research and make an initial connection and then a second time to conduct the interviews.

Once I had established contact and scheduled the interviews I wrote out my biases and expectations of the interviews. All the interviews were tape-recorded and lasted between one to two hours. As well as recording the interviews I took extensive notes. All of the interviewees were pleased to participate in my research. Before interviewing the participants they signed my letter of informed consent, which I also signed. Some participants requested that I not include particularly sensitive material in the data, which I respected. In order to keep a level of consistency, I have presented my interviewees as the Participants A, B, and C from each organization. All seventeen interviews have been transcribed, revealing about 26 hours of tape recorded interviews. As a result of the interview process and field experience, I believe my data quality and credibility to be reasonably assured.

According to Zelditch in Marshall and Rossman (1995), interview methods are the most efficient method of obtaining information on the description of processes, concepts, categories and typologies. Marshall & Rossman view qualitative research methods as "identifying the unanticipated outcomes of policies and finding inconsistencies and conflicts built into policies." It is their view that qualitative research methods help find the "natural" solutions to problems - the

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6 See Appendix D
7 Marshall and Rossman, 1995, p. 105
8 ibid
solutions people devise without policy intervention. Qualitative research therefore enabled me to investigate the subtleties of the MOU policy implementation process which needed to be explored in order to assess what is happening in the child labour issue in Bangladesh. My findings are presented in the hope that they will help make the important questions clearer, by describing the patterns of implementation and identifying the challenges and barriers which could lead to more effective policy outcomes in the area of implementing an educational program for child garment workers.

1.3 Research Tool

In order to link the specific research questions to larger theoretical constructs related to child labour, the interview questions touched upon the following key factors; an examination of the management of the MOU negotiation process and its eventual implementation, an investigation into cultural understandings of childhood, a discussion of the UNCRC and its emphasis on the "best interests" of children, and the political economy of the garment industry. The main research question asked of the participants was what they viewed as the essential elements required to develop an educational program for child garment workers. More specifically, I asked each participant to answer the following series of questions; their official responsibilities in relation to the MOU, their self motivation and self-assessment of their work, an assessment of the other partners' work and self, an
assessment of the project as a whole, and the international ramifications of such an educational model. I used my questions and comments as a way of stimulating and provoking a fuller expression of views from the respondents.

I wanted to take the approach that my participants were partners in my research, and that the interviewees felt that they were actively involved, so that together we were constructing fuller answers to questions that cannot be answered in simple, straightforward ways. I felt that by asking them for a self-assessment and assessment of the other players' motivation, I would get a thorough representation of the MOU process and touch generally upon the major concerns for the future of the MOU project.

By grounding the interviews in accounts of everyday life, DeVault believes we will find that social organization is "in the talk" and we can mine the talk for clues to social relations. While listening to the participants' responses, the key is to listen to the "Unsaid" which, as Geertz implies, involves noticing ambiguity and problems of expression in interview data and attempting to articulate the missing parts of the account. DeVault's account of the unsaid is the unspoken knowledge as being part of the unnoticed matrix of social organization that constructs both interview talk, and the participant's reaction to it.  

All the interviews were in-depth, structured sessions lasting from one to two hours and all of them were transcribed, coded and categorized into themes. As I interviewed seventeen participants, I was able to work with a great deal of data at an

\[\text{See DeVault, 1990}\]
early stage. This enabled me to consider what was known and not known about child labour in Bangladesh, suggesting new relationships, propositions, and explanations for further analysis.

1.4 Personal Bias

During my first visit to Bangladesh in 1994, I had the opportunity to visit a number of BRAC NFPE rural schools and was moved by the tremendous need and hunger these children had for the little education they received. In 1995, the summer before I interned with UNICEF-Bangladesh, I returned to Dhaka where I worked on contract at UNICEF-Bangladesh for three months as a speech writer and funding proposal editor and became quite familiar with the texts, reports and other UNICEF and NGO documentation on working children and education in Bangladesh. When I first heard about the MOU, I was intrigued as it was a program aimed at the very children whose rights to education seemed to have been forgotten.

As a North American, white, female graduate student, my perspective on child labour and the education system in Bangladesh is similar to the view espoused by the ILO and UNICEF. My vocabulary and knowledge base was most similar to the UNICEF and ILO development workers. However, I was also empathetic to those views which criticized the MOU as an educational development model. As an intern with UNICEF yet at the same time an independent researcher, I was careful
that my research was not swayed by the fact that UNICEF had granted me an internship opportunity.

The post-modernist concern with "inter-subjectivity" - how the researcher and participants affect each other - is important to mention, because my position as UNICEF intern may have affected the participants' reactions to me and their responses to the interview questions. Given the fact that I was less able to comprehend the points of view of Bangladeshi garment factory owners, and Ministry of Education staff, I acknowledge the bias of this study. It would be an interesting research project for a contrast to be made between my findings and those conducted by a Bangladeshi female graduate student.

Gudmundsdottir makes special reference to the problems of implicit interpretation of research data and sums up her views by suggesting "that despite our best efforts at re-creating, describing, and interpreting our informants' reality in our research reports, we have to bow to the inevitable... we listen to their words, and try to reconstruct their meaning, but we can never be sure about the accuracy of these transformations."¹⁰ Gudmundsdottir draws attention to the fact that the tasks of responding to interview questions, hearing and interpreting all involve drawing upon narrative structures that are pervasive in our culture.

Geertz's chapter entitled *Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture* from his book *The Interpretation of Cultures* was extremely helpful in guiding my understanding of the discourse of cultural analysis. I wanted to discern

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¹⁰ Gudmundsdottir, 1996, p. 303
the significance of interviewing participants from a diverse cultural background to explore and use accurate terminology in presenting sensitive concepts of cultural understanding. Geertz states that our naturalistic analysis of culture is an interpretive one in search of meaning and our task as researchers is to pick our way through the multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another. Geertz reminds us that our data exists as our own constructions of other people’s constructions, in other words our data is obscured by our own bias.

Culture is described by Geertz as a context, something within which social events, behaviours, institutions and processes can be described. I agree with Geertz that the claim of good research is the “degree to which we are able to clarify what is going on in events and to reduce the puzzlement” and that “a good interpretation takes us to the heart of that which is the interpretation, tracing the curve of social discourse and fixing it into an inspectable form.” It is imperative to be aware that throughout this research process, my progress is marked less by a perfection of consensus than by a gradual refinement of debate. I would argue that qualitative research is intrinsically incomplete and that while we attempt to clarify cultural significance, culture itself remains a mystery.

The fact that a number of my interviewees were not native English speakers made language an important bias as many participants might have had the ability to express their thoughts and reflections better in Bengali than in English. The studies

" Geertz, 1973, p. 27
of women in research whose native tongue is not English, by the feminist researcher, Marjorie DeVault, made me more aware of the difficulties the participants faced when describing their experiences. DeVault and Geertz both discuss the importance of the speech event - the "said" of speaking which wants to become the enunciated, not the event as event. Our interpretation of cultural analysis, then, involves trying to rescue the "said" of such discourse and putting it into perusable forms. "The office of theory in the interpretation of the 'said' is to provide a vocabulary in which what symbolic action has to say about itself can be expressed."¹² In addition to language, the male/female dynamic may have changed the research data, particularly when I interviewed Bangladeshi men. Thus, the levels of context which play a role in the discussion of bias include; language, gender, political, and socio-cultural differences, although the degree of bias is impossible to determine with accuracy.

What was of great interest to me was the fact that I had, by accepting the UNICEF internship, allied myself with a UN agency. I found that at times it was useful but at other times doors were closed to me because of this affiliation. I attempted to remedy this situation by clearly stating that although I was interning with UNICEF, I did not necessarily share UNICEF's view of the MOU. Before conducting my interviews I highlighted the fact that I was a graduate student from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. There were a number of other complex variables and interactions embedded in this

¹² Geertz, 1973, p. 27
research relating to the highly controversial aspect of trade relations between the United States and Bangladesh and the sensitive issue of child labour. However, as an independent researcher, I felt free to make associations and study all aspects of the child labour debate. I was not prepared for the criticisms of the MOU by other NGOs based in Bangladesh such as Save the Children Fund UK and AAFLI, as I had a naive belief, at least initially, that all NGO personnel would support this program or at least would not want to mobilize any objections with the tenets of the program.

As an act of reciprocity, I wrote a draft for the funding proposal highlighting the need for renewed support from donors for the MOU project. As part of my internship I wrote the brochure commemorating the first anniversary of the MOU schools project which was handed out to over 500 guests from all aspects of the NGO, private sector, and government community who attended the one year anniversary of the MOU signing.

**Section Summary**

This section of chapter one has outlined the methodological, structural and theoretical approaches to conducting qualitative research on the Memorandum of Understanding schools project towards eliminating child labour in the Bangladeshi garment industry. In addition to the interviews, unobtrusive data collection such as reading reports, steering committee minutes, and other academic research on the topic of child labour validated my research. By conducting field visits to MOU
schools, I was able to follow up on the raw data and verify some of my claims. My personal biases are also stated and my capacity as UNICEF intern assessed appropriately.

**B. Research Analysis**

“Our informant’s spoken words are not as untainted as we would like them to be. Moreover, as data is further processed and interpreted, it is also more firmly imprinted with narrative structures through us doing the interpretation.”

Gudmundsdottir, 1996, p. 299

In beginning my analysis of the views presented by the seventeen participants, I discovered that the most current and legitimate critical analysis of the MOU project came from the suggestions advanced and comments made by the participants interviewed in the preparation for this thesis. In the analysis, I have expressed the concerns of the participants. It is their narrative, their particular articulations which aid in gaining a clearer understanding of the MOU negotiation process and the existing school programs. The research findings aim to identify the challenges and barriers to the MOU which could lead to more effective policy outcomes.

The research process involved interviewing middle-management personnel from the key partners in the MOU negotiation process. As qualitative research
focuses more on understanding the subject's perspectives or 'emic' than on understanding the researchers' perspective or 'etic,' this research process allows for the identification of indigenous categories, semantic expressions, attitudes, values, and norms. The analysis process has identified 'universal' versus 'group-specific' concepts of childhood and child labour as well as other major themes. The result is that qualitative analytic approaches have provided information which is able to identify potentially important variables and point to possible causal networks to generate hypotheses.\textsuperscript{13}

1.5 Participant Profile

All seventeen participants were involved in the MOU schools project either as direct signatories or indirect shapers of the dialogue process and represent the interests of the ILO, UNICEF, BRAC, GSS, BGMEA, additional NGOs and Bangladeshi and American Government personnel. My participants were chosen because they were the decision-makers and opinion-moulders involved in finding a solution to the child labour situation in the Bangladeshi garment industry. The educational backgrounds represented in the participant profile include history, philosophy, political science, psychology, chemistry, development management, social work, and urban labour law. Many diverse viewpoints and backgrounds are therefore reflected in the raw data regarding the MOU schools project and are

\textsuperscript{13} See Strauss and Corbin, 1990
indicative of the multi-disciplinary approach to the study of child labour.

1.6 Summary of Major Themes

In the life of a research project, not all the words that are heard and written down become significant "data" to be manipulated in different ways by the interpretive process. Some narrative images, however, are not capable of being captured by words. Those images that are captured suffer from the urge that we, the researchers and the participants alike, have to communicate in complete and proper sentences.14 Nevertheless, the views presented by the participants can be categorized into the following three major themes; diverse anthropological conceptions of childhood, the political economy of child labour in the garment industry, and human rights concerns regarding working children's rights. In some cases, the participants' responses were similar and in other cases patterns critiquing the MOU and the negotiation process are revealed. By tracing out the participants' dialogues I found very different perceptions about the MOU and child labour. The analytical process itself involved looking for codes to describe the emerging patterns of beliefs and opinions.

Tesch recommends that to be a good phenomenological researcher, one must become deeply involved with the phenomenon to be studied and know a lot about it on a human level. She considers a holistic approach to understanding the

14 Gudmundsdottir, 1996, p. 296
emergence of themes: (i) the researcher must engage the material she wishes to understand interactively; and (ii) she must bring to the task certain human capacities such as a sense-making, order-making, and recognition-producing capabilities, and she must activate them.\textsuperscript{15} Originally there were nine major codes which included; i) the perspectives from the BGMEA, industry and employers, ii) perspectives from the Bangladeshi government and PMED in particular, iii) cultural perspectives of child and child labour, iv) the MOU - praises and criticisms, v) NGOs and their perspectives and opinions of the MOU, vi) education in Bangladesh both formal and non-formal, vii) UN agencies and their approach to the MOU, viii) issues of funding, ix) and the perspective of children’s rights.

These codes were then categorized into larger metathemes, then into three workable themes addressing the central question of what makes a successful educational program for child garment workers. In linking patterns of thought and opinion in this complex discussion of child labour in Bangladesh, I have simplified the discussion of findings by outlining three major themes.

Recurring sub-themes in the raw data included the apparent transparency of the program versus obvious violations of the terms of the MOU and the uncertain motivation for support of the MOU program on the part of the Government of Bangladesh and the Government of the United States. The following theme summaries reveal the most frequently expressed attitudes and those that take issue with prevailing sentiments.

\textsuperscript{15} Tesch, 1987, p. 233
Mapping the patterns of belief and attitudes regarding childhood and child labour revealed by the participants showed that on the part of the Bangladeshi participants, a good deal of hypocrisy existed between their work lives, i.e. working towards the gradual elimination of child labour, and their home lives where most of the participants employed children as domestic servants. The participants who employed children in their own homes all stated that these child domestic workers did not attend school. Five out of nine of the Bangladeshi participants openly admitted to employing child domestic servants in their home, thus revealing the extent of this practice and how endemic it is to Bangladeshi society.

It was difficult to ignore remarks from many of my participants who employed children in their own homes but who saw no obvious contradictions between their home and work lives. Most Bangladeshi participants were not convinced that the practice itself - as opposed to its most exploitative forms - was damaging.

**Political Economy of Child Labour in the Garment Industry**

The structure of development aid and the dependency of developing world economies upon World Bank and IMF structural adjustment programs means that fewer resources are available for education, particularly at the primary level for the most marginalized children. Fewer and fewer resources have been channeled into
outreach to the poor, resulting in urban-rural migration, and adult unemployment. Slum housing creates the danger of leaving children unattended and the 'feminization of the garment industry' has created a demand for young women and girls to take up "light work," by offering a relatively secure environment.

* A Human Rights-Based Approach to Educational Development

The theme of a "rights-based approach to educational development" came through in the analysis of the research findings. The question of whether the MOU is an embodiment of such a development approach involves a complex understanding of humanity and moral philosophy. Most of my participants stated that human rights are understood as a concept of good in any culture, whether they are referred to as "rights" or not and contended that although the MOU as legislative doctrine is inherited from a "Western" European understanding of children's rights, it is nevertheless highly valued in Bangladeshi society as an effort to improve the life chances of child workers. The differences in the UN construction of the "best interests principle" versus the complexities involved in the conceptualization of childhood in Bangladeshi culture, and the social implications these differences may have when adopting a "Western" concept of children and rights is also referred to as a sub-theme.
1.7 Analytic Methodology

I share the view of Gudmundsdottir and Connelly & Clandinin (1990) concerning the interview process as an essential aspect of narrative inquiry. The entire research process starting with the data collection and moving through the interpretation stage is essentially a "meaning-making process" and thus has, as Gudmundsdottir states, "important narrative characteristics." In other words, the phenomenon of child labour as I have studied it involves the analysis of narrative thought, as does the method required to investigate the phenomenon.

Narrative form is used by everyone as an "heuristic device to sort out the relevant facts and arrange them in some kind of logical order, and when our participants explain what they know, we often hear a story, because that is how reality appears to us." According to Gudmundsdottir, there is a good reason for informants to secure a narrative niche, especially when we ask them to talk about their experience, because often times it is the first time they have had to describe it. However, as Gudmundsdottir states, "some images are not capable of being captured by words, and those that are suffer from the urge that we, researchers and participants alike, have to communicate in complete and proper sentences."

Gudmundsdottir studies how narrative elements furnished by Western culture can influence what research participants say and how they tell it, and how

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16 Gudmundsdottir, 1996, p. 295
17 ibid, p. 296
18 ibid, p. 297
19 ibid
the interpretation of this narrative then shapes not only the interview situation itself, but also subsequent interpretation. She describes four integrated elements which shape the research process including: observational data, the stories informants tell, the stories we hear, and the theoretical models guiding our research.20 She states that “the cultural context of the research situation and the theoretical framework both limit and define the aspects, or ‘chunks’, of the informants’ reality that they have the opportunity to describe in their answers.”21

By stating in the introduction that this research project is a case study, I share Gudmundsdottir’s belief that the joint cooperation of the researcher and the participants together creates a meaningful whole. This research narrative or case study is “always only a composite picture of a limited part of the informants’ reality, never the whole story.”22 The phenomenon of narrative inquiry thus is:

"a multiplicity of authors, participants, and researchers, each borrowing from the models of meaning supplied by the culture... simultaneously created by the individual and furnished by our culture. Religion, ideology, legends, folklore, the education system and academic disciplines supply ready-made narrative models of the world.”23

For the central research question in this thesis, I asked my participants what essential elements were part of the most workable solution towards educating child garment workers. The interviews comprised an evaluation of the participants’

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20 ibid, p. 294
21 ibid
22 ibid
23 ibid, p. 295
work and an assessment of the program using interview questions which entailed indirect reviews of their work. The interview questions asked the participants to describe their relationship to the MOU by discussing their official responsibilities, self-motivation and self-assessment of their work, motivation of other partners and an assessment of other partners work efforts, an assessment of the project as a whole, and the international ramifications of this project.

According to Gudmundsdottir, the questions we ask in an interview are guided by observation and a theoretical framework; we ask questions because we need data for our analytic and descriptive categories. Our questions therefore signify not only what we want to know, but also what we know already, and our informant’s narratives reflect both. According to Loftus (1979), if our interview questions become part of the participant’s narrative, then the stories we tell in our research reports and articles are as much stories of how we interpret theory in terms of the data we have gathered as they are stories of and about our findings. This means that our data is not as untainted as we would like it to be and “as this data is further processed and interpreted, it is also more firmly imprinted with narrative structures through us doing the interpretation.”

To understand the narrative exchange between researcher and participant is to uncover a wide range of background assumptions and what these additional thoughts are depends on our background and training as researchers. In the research process, the themes, patterns, and working hypotheses are part of the

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24 ibid. p. 299
narrative method of inquiry as these structures do not appear ready-made out of the blue. In the analysis process, I was constantly linking commonalities, relating general themes, and developing categories for these themes, and as Gudmundsdottir states “these decisions are the foundation for the analytic processes in research...they are the unconscious, spontaneous and based on comparisons with what we already know.”  

Section Summary

This section of chapter one identifies the methodology used in the analysis of the interviews regarding the Memorandum of Understanding schools for child garment workers. This chapter provides a profile of the interview participants. In addition, a summary of the major themes gleaned from the interviews is introduced. In chapter six, these themes are developed and the interview findings are expanded in greater detail. The analytic methodology has identified the benefits of narrative inquiry, highlighting the work of Gudmundsdottir and Connelly and Clandinin.

ibid, p. 302
CHAPTER TWO

Childhood and Education: Definitions and Prioritization

"The reduction of child labour in Bangladesh is necessarily contingent on the expansion and reinforcement of the education system, whose defects clearly fuel the flow of children into the workplace."


This chapter examines the anthropological dimension of Bangladeshi interpretations of childhood in order to clarify the indigenous meaning of personhood and rights. By getting the anthropological debates clear at the beginning we are enabled to pursue a deeper understanding of the child labour issue and relate it to the Memorandum of Understanding and its particular origins in the rights-based approach to educational development. The politicization of education is then analyzed and attributed to the limits of the formal education system, and deep-rooted class differences which characterize Bangladesh society. The non-formal primary education system of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and Gonoshahajjo Sangstha (GSS) are presented as appropriate alternatives for working children who cannot enter the government system.

My approach to the thesis research process involved the understanding of complex and varied opinions regarding the phenomenon of child labour in another culture, that of Bangladesh. Geertz describes the research process as "understanding a form of life ... and convincing others that you have indeed done so," which as he
suggests “involves more than the assembly of telling particulars or the imposition of general narratives, it involves bringing figure and ground, the passing occasion and the long story, into coincident view.”

The elusiveness of universal normative consensus on the elimination of child labour can, thus, readily be appreciated in view of the diversity of cultural and contextual realities which condition people’s beliefs and behaviour in daily life. Significant differences about the perceptions of childhood and circumstances affecting behaviour regarding children in the South and the North condition views about child labour and children’s rights within these regions.

One of the major themes which has emerged in this research project relates to difference in perceptions of childhood: conflicting ideas as to what is a child, the value of children, and their role in society. What is important in this chapter is the recognition of diverse cultural positions with respect to children. Within my participant base, three very different perceptions are identifiable. First, the Bangladeshi participants not working for an international donor agency such as the BGMEA and PMED officials, viewed childhood as it is bound up in their roles as members of the upper-middle class in Bangladeshi society. Their world view does not share the same conceptualization of children as that of the second group of participants, namely Bangladeshis who work for international development agencies who I would argue hold a bi-cultural view of childhood and display tensions in their understandings of the value of children. The third example of

1 Geertz, 1995, p. 51
cultural perceptions of childhood is that of the Western view, those non-Bangladeshis who have a "child’s rights centered" understanding of the value of children.

To explicate some of these complexities (some of which involve unavoidable contradictions), I attempt to shed some light on the formative arguments in the area of childhood and labour. I have focused on the work of Thérèse Blanchet, a Canadian anthropologist working in Bangladesh, in order to outline the complexity of the issues in the application of a universally sanctioned understanding of children’s rights to education and safe working environments. The more general interpretations of culture used in this chapter, stem from Clifford Geertz’s anthropological essays in After the Fact: Two Counties, Four Decades, One Anthropologist.

2.1 The Importance of an Anthropological Discussion of Childhood

Anthropologists have amply demonstrated how perceptions of childhood differ between countries and societies. Blanchet, on the basis of thirteen years of work and experience in Bangladesh, explains in Lost Innocence, Stolen Childhoods how conceptions of childhood determine behaviour in Bangladeshi society and define the notions of personhood and rights pertaining to persons, as they apply to children as a class. She points to the scarcity of academic works which touch upon

\footnote{See Margaret Mead, Childhood in Contemporary Cultures, 1955}
the conceptualization of childhood, particularly in relation to international aid, claiming that children are not recognized often enough as crucial ‘human resources’ in the development process.

In Bangladeshi society, the prevailing notions of childhood vary according to class and religion. In such a populous and complex culture, great diversities characterize the economic and social status, and standard of living of Bangladeshis who judge all other members of their society in terms of three defining categories: the Bengali term *samaj* meaning society, or more specifically the moral community, the term *dhormo* referring to one’s life path or order of natural and moral society, and *jati* referring to one’s gender, caste or religious group serve to categorize individuals in groups; these judgments are particularly critical in reaching an understanding of where children of the poor or *kangali* are seen as participating in life.³

Those members of Bangladeshi society whom I interviewed, such as the businessmen or government officials, would adhere to the traditional view of *samaj* and were not in a position to change society’s perceptions or views about sensitive issues. In the case of child labour, the research data found that the Bangladeshi participants working in the BGMEA and the GOB Ministry of Education placed the least value on children who work. Their remarks about lower class working children as “not worth building schools” could be misinterpreted as highly prejudiced, but when one understands the ties to traditional *samaj*, one

³ See Blanchet, 1996, p. 225
begins to understand their world view.

The complex and changing relationship between state, samaj, dhormo, and jati are crucial, then, for an understanding of human rights and the rights of children in Bangladesh. For most Bangladeshis, far more important than being citizens of a nation-state, is to be a member of a samaj. Samaj upholds a moral order, a more enduring membership associated with 'proper living.' Samaj is the moral society which upholds the dhormo. The shifting meanings of samaj through time, space and conjecture define the Bengali social order.

It must be noted that women's place in the samaj is based on their role as wives, mothers, and daughters. Women occupying prominent positions such as the former Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Khaleda Zia, and the present Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, illustrate the different norms operating in state institutions and in the samaj. Girls therefore are unlikely ever to have rights, in the conventional sense accorded to boys, because recognition and respect in the samaj are tied with age, marriage, parenthood, as well as to wealth, lineage, and reputation. In addition, the reputation of families, lineage, and samaj are highly affected by the conduct of female members, which may be accountable for the marriage of girl children to safeguard family honour. Instilling attitudes of extreme modesty and feelings of shame or lojja are part of the education of all girls and young women in all classes of society.

In Bangladeshi society, parents see themselves as ultimately responsible for

\footnote{1 Blanchet, 1996, p. 225}
\footnote{2 ibid, p. 230}
\footnote{3 ibid, p. 57}
their children's welfare. Traditionally, parents exercise extraordinarily strong powers of decision over their children, to the point of denying them important rights, such as allowing them to choose their own marriage partner freely. Because parenthood, especially motherhood, entails unquestionable morality and even sacredness, parents are regarded as always "knowing" best for their children. This thick cover provided by the ostensible exercise of responsibility however masks, the exploitation of children in all too many cases. Traditionally, all children are conditioned by this system. Blanchet asks whether the state is willing and/or capable of imposing limits to guardians' power and authority over children.1

Samaj in the urban context sets boundaries between the immediate family and the outside world, between "us" and "them," in other words. The middle class proudly refers to its sense of family, honour and morality, within the bond of the samaj. The dweller in an urban slum, where the majority of child workers live, is without samaj. That is, such persons function without an effective social mechanism to regulate their affairs and uphold morality. Thus, Blanchet is very concerned that promoting the universal rights of children may entail more than the re-insertion of marginalized children into society. It will in fact, require greater tolerance and a broadening of the boundaries of the samaj; that is, a redefinition of the criteria which determine honour and respect.

Urban society in Bangladesh is growing quickly and sub-cultures are developing which are neither known nor understood by social scientists, let alone

1 ibid, p.143
government agencies or activist groups. Furthermore, because of entrenched class-biased and existing models of expected behaviour, children form a fragmented class in Bangladesh. Between the ages of eight and sixteen, children and youth are more often identified by what separates them than by what they share in common. Abdullahi An-Na’im, a well-published writer on child rights issues, supports this contention by suggesting that children are neither a social sector nor a coherent group as such and that therefore, they have different social origins and relationships. What are taken to be the needs of children might in fact be class or sectarian needs.

Blanchet is also concerned that Western, liberal ideologies proclaiming the primacy of the individual and the right to express personal choices need not be the only way to legitimate differences between human beings. Blanchet expresses concern that policy makers, government officials, and professionals in public institutions faithfully reflect their upper and middle class backgrounds and that these class biases will be the ones which translate the provisions and the spirit of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

For the Bangladeshi participants in the research process who worked for international development agencies, their perception of the value of children was one which displayed a certain tension expressed by their bi-cultural understanding of the issue. This tension can be seen in the fact that most child welfare workers at the ILO, BRAC and UNICEF employed children in their homes as domestic servants

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*An-Na’im, 1994, p. 80*
who did not attend school. Thus, the theme of determining the value of children is complicated by virtue of the reasoned judgment that Bangladeshi employees of international organizations are seemingly unable to escape the power of the *samaj*.

Claiming that the UNCRC is based on contemporary Western models of childhood, Blanchet questions whether the Convention's provisions can be translated into the Bangladeshi *samaj* and its intentions pursued in Bangladesh. Her question has particular relevance as the UNCRC presents children as individuals with individual needs, reproducing a "western" ideology which does not help to grasp the social and cultural embeddedness of Bangladeshi children's lives. In Bangladeshi society parents take decisions for their children, thus the interest of the child and that of the family are not seen as distinct and separate. Blanchet claims that the problem with the UNCRC is that in Bangladeshi society, the rights to freedom of expression, free access to information, freedom of thought and association are not expected to be claimed by children, let alone granted by parents.

It should also be noted that the Bengali words chosen to translate the UNCRC convey a different meaning than the UNCRC text conveys in its official version. The usual translation of "child", namely "shishu", carries with it the concept of innocence and therefore excludes two types of children: i) those who work, and ii) adolescents. It does not convey the same message as conveyed in the UNCRC document. It is important to recognize these gaps, misunderstandings and

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6 Blanchet, 1996, p. 224
7 ibid, p. 225
discrepancies indicating differences in the conceptualization of childhood.

It is possible to draw parallels between traditional Bangladeshi attitudes about childhood and those prevailing at the onset of the machine age in 19th century Europe and North America. Children at most times and in most places had to earn their keep. Particularly among the working classes, they were, until recently, seen only as an extension of adult society, joining in adult activities as soon as they were able to do so. It was only after protracted struggle that the concept evolved of children as a distinct social group, with a need for safeguards and rights of their own. The prevailing 20th century notion of childhood current in most policy planning, is according to Blanchet and other commentators, largely based on middle-class, western ideals of schoolwork, play and protection from any form of economic activity. The reality is that children in many countries cannot afford to go to school, and must work if they are to eat. Often enough, they must work if their family is to eat.

The advantage of Blanchet's anthropological perspective is that it analyzes the value of rights within a social and cultural universe. Her pioneering work in this field has opened up a wide spectrum of Bangladeshi social science to western researchers. She argues convincingly that a society must be understood in relation to the cultural terms which constitute its universe, "for ways of knowing and valuing are culturally specific."\textsuperscript{11} The construction of class and gender inequalities are shown rooted in the very definition of childhood, with class and gender often

\textsuperscript{11} Blanchet, 1996, p. 1
being more important criteria than years of age in determining the roles, rights and obligations of children. According to Blanchet, reducing inequalities between children entails a major political transformation of the society as a whole.

2.2 Childhood and the State

Blanchet joins other writers in criticizing the role of the Bangladeshi state’s social welfare apparatus. She contends that Bangladesh state agencies do not believe they have any responsibilities towards children not considered part of the “samaj” consensus. An additional complication is that Islamic religious laws clash with equal rights recognized to the citizens of Bangladesh in the Constitution. In regulating behaviour, the codified personal law legitimated by religious authority tends to prevail over the Constitution, and an uncodified custom interpreted and enforced by the members of the local samaj tends to supersede the codified law. The dysfunctional social welfare system is further aggravated by a corrupt social security structure.

The legal system is often misused to extort bribes from those who break the law, becoming part of a system which, according to Blanchet, transforms the state into a market. She is concerned that these occurrences are so endemic to the culture of government departments, and so extensive, “that the immorality and illegality of services and human rights violated in the process are seldom checked.”

\(^{12}\) ibid, p. 223
\(^{13}\) ibid, p. 229
\(^{14}\) ibid, p. 194
agents and the citizens they are meant to serve and protect do not belong to the same moral community and state agents protect the rights of parents over the rights of children, and activate the law for those who have money.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, Blanchet argues that the state is not a samaj, but rather a market in which public services are managed in absolute "rent-seeking" conditions.\textsuperscript{16}

The malfunctioning legal system renders the search to obtain legal protection for children extremely difficult. For example, in the absence of birth registration, children in Bangladesh are neither accounted for nor accurately recorded. The absence of such records is indicative of the poor knowledge the state has about children and the low priority given to child support. Thus, the State "manifests greater preoccupation with its image than with the well-being of children."\textsuperscript{17} This issue is important to this study because most of the thrust for the implementation of the UNCRC worldwide has been on developing legal texts, rather than functioning systems of law.

Bangladesh ratified the UNCRC in 1990, but as Blanchet reminds us, few public debates were held on the issue. Yet for reasons of ostensible Bangladeshi national pride, it was celebrated in the media in a way designed to enhance Bangladesh in international fora. Together with the Constitution of the country, Blanchet contends that:

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{15} Blanchet, 1996, p. 176
\textsuperscript{16} ibid
\textsuperscript{17} ibid p. 173

Note: It is important that the phenomenon of corruption in the legal system in Bangladesh be approached analytically, so that the judgments are complemented by an understanding of the social and cultural processes which lead to the domination of such systems.
\end{flushleft}
“the purpose of such laws is to proclaim a symbolic commitment to certain values and to provide a positive facade to a Westernized Bangladeshi elite and to the outer world that the rights of children are being properly safeguarded. It need not cause society to change and affect the administration of justice.” 15

Her point is that regardless of the text of the law, the spirit of its application most often conforms to the norms of the samaj. The 1974 Bangladesh Constitution spells out an obligation to provide universal education, but it has been slow to give priority to this sector. Blanchet contends that whether children attend school or not and notwithstanding how long they do so, the content of school curricula and classroom culture all impact highly on the experience and duration of childhood and on how society reproduces itself. 19 In 1993 the national aim of the “Education For All” campaign in Bangladesh included an adult literacy rate of 62% and 70% attendance for the first five years of primary education. This was an ambitious pledge and as we can see in 1997, unrealistic. In fact, a mere 23% of children of primary school age complete the primary school cycle and the retention rate is one of the lowest in the world. 20

Myron Weiner’s book The Child and the State in India : Child Labour and Education Policy in Comparative Perspective adds context to this issue by permitting a comparison of the discussion of children and the state in India and Bangladesh. In both countries, the conventional argument voiced by the state regarding child labour is that poverty must be reduced in order for the elimination

15 Blanchet, 1996, p. 174
19 ibid, p. 177
20 ibid
of child labour to occur. It is believed by the state apparatus that poverty’s reduction “by economic growth, by employment generation and by investment, by better distribution of income, by changes in the global economy, as well as by better allocation of government budgets and better targeting of aid flows will reduce the potential pool of child labourers.”\textsuperscript{21} But Blanchet stresses that these precise measurements of poverty have ignored the processes which in fact create poverty, thereby implying that the poor are an undifferentiated passive mass, in need of aid and that such negative characterization somehowobliterates the recognition of their human rights.\textsuperscript{22} Needless to say, the end of hazardous child labour is neither necessarily nor even contingently dependent upon the end of poverty.

In India, child labour is referred to as “the harsh reality” and in Bangladesh as “a necessary evil.” Weiner’s study reveals that this harsh reality is believed by government officials, religious figures, intellectuals, and the influential middle class to be a necessary stage in economic and social development, and that as employment and income increase, it will no longer be necessary for the poor to send their children to work and the benefits of education will become more apparent.\textsuperscript{23} However, societal-centered explanations do not stand up against historical and comparative evidence, such as in the case of the Indian state of Kerala where the per capita income does not differ from that of the rest of the country, yet it has achieved a literacy rate of 85%. He suggests that the major obstacles to the achievement of universal primary education and the abolition of child labour in a

\textsuperscript{21} State of the World’s Children, 1997, p. 20
\textsuperscript{22} Blanchet, 1996, p. 237
\textsuperscript{23} Weiner, 1991, p. 13
general sense “are not simply the level of industrialization, per capita income and the socio-economic conditions of families, the level of overall government expenditures in education, nor the demographic consequences of a rapid expansion in the number of school age children.” Weiner states that it is the complex of attitudes of officialdom itself and the absence of any strong support for governmental intervention from within the state apparatus that explain the lack of momentum regarding Indian policy towards eradicating child labour. In other words, “the key notion in child-labour policy in India has become amelioration, not abolition; and in education; incentives, not compulsion.”

Blanchet also draws parallels with India where numerous declarations of intent and state constitutions guaranteeing the right of all children to an education fail as “only 40% of adults above age 15 can read and write.” Blanchet examines the apathy in changing structures and beliefs surrounding child labour and equal access to education, attributing it to a built-in middle class interest in maintaining a subservient class, on the basis that if the children of the poor are to receive an education, it may not be at all convenient for the more privileged classes.

Weiner’s central argument is the criticism of the rigid dichotomy between work and education. Rather than use child labour as an explanation for low retention rates and poor educational performance as has been the norm, he views the challenge to educators as the fact that, given the prevailing economic situation in a country like Bangladesh, the majority of poor children work either full or part-

\(^{24}\) Weiner, 1991, p. 6
\(^{25}\) Blanchet, 1996, p. 180
time in paid or unpaid employment. His view is that the onus of responsibility then falls on educators to develop education programs that specifically accommodate the economic activities carried out by children. In the extreme situations of work which pose direct and immediate threats to a child's welfare, such as prostitution, there will continue to be a 'zero-tolerance' policy. But in the majority of cases, it does not necessarily follow that a child who is working cannot be educated.27

Numerous examples of children going to extreme lengths to combine school and work have been recorded by NGOs such as BRAC and GSS. In fact, in my field experience I noticed a definite trend among the children attending the MOU schools in Chittagong to attend school from 7-9 am and then rush to the garment factories to begin a 10 or 12 hour shift. There is also an indication that under certain circumstances, child work and education are positively correlated - i.e. when children work and contribute to the family's income, it is likely that child will have a stronger voice in the decision-making processes within the family, one of which could be the ability to assert the right to go to school. Conversely, when children do not work and remain dependents, the scope for asserting the right to go to school is compromised.28

27 See Bissell and Sobhan, 1996, p. 28
28 Bissell and Sobhan, 1996, p. 29
2.3 Education in Bangladesh

The Formal System

This section discusses the major limitations of the formal education system in Bangladesh; (i) the unfavourable enrollment, attendance and completion rates, (ii) the lack of political will to change the system reflecting the prevailing middle class attitudes regarding children who labour, and (iii) the Government's deliberate distortion of primary education figures. Fifty two percent of the population of Bangladesh is under 18 years of age. Put another way, children make up more than half of the population. This demographic phenomenon poses a formidable educational and development challenge and it is important to consider how these numbers of children are reflected in government educational policies and programs.

With a current school population of 16.7 million children, a total of 6.9 million children are not enrolled in school. An additional 5.9 million children enrolled in the primary school system at some point, but have subsequently dropped out, usually in the first two years. Thus, 12.8 million children (about 76.6% of all school age children) in Bangladesh receive effectively no education at all. Given that 76.6% of all school-age children receive no proper education, little more than one third of primary school-age children actually remain in school for the entire class I - V school period. Such low rates of access and retention are due to

\[\text{See UNICEF Working Document, 1995}\]
\[\text{ibid}\]
\[\text{ibid}\]
over-crowded classrooms, irrelevant curricula, poorly motivated teachers, and the high cost of keeping children in school. Of the 45,783 primary schools in the country, 85% are run by the government. The average primary school class size is estimated for 1990 at about 62 students for classes I and II. Schools are often far from the students homes and in Bangladesh’s flood-prone landscape even a short distance of 1 to 2 kilometers can become a barrier for young children.

The 53 primary teaching institutions in the country have a capacity for producing 10,000 teachers every year, but they are seriously underutilized. This under-enrollment of teachers is due in part to the Government’s limited efforts to recruit primary teachers which are linked to its unwillingness to commit itself to pay those teachers’ salaries without adequate recurrent funds in its budgets. In addition to underused teaching facilities, providing educational and other essential services for this cohort of students presents a heavy burden on the nation’s economy. The average percentage of the Bangladeshi GNP spent on primary education is 1.9%, well below the world average of 4.3%.

The ABEL Report suggests that even if sufficient financial resources are committed to a Bangladeshi universal primary education system, considerable logistical problems still remain to be considered in expanding a service quickly and on such a large scale. Further obstacles include i) the fact that children in the first two years of primary school in Bangladesh have the lowest number of school hours

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32 ibid, p. 8  
33 See UNICEF Working Document, 1995  
34 ABEL Report, 1993, p. 32  
35 ibid, p. 33  
36 ibid, p. 179
of any country in the world, ii) the appointment and supervision of teachers as a consequence of political considerations, and iii) the offering of bribes by teaching staff to supervisors in order to avoid being penalized. The ABEL Report presents an informative case scenario regarding future costs on the part of the GOB.

As the formal education system is under-funded and over-extended, it certainly cannot address specific problems, particularly those of 'children in especially difficult circumstances' such as child prostitutes, street children, and child labourers - problems which non-formal education attempts to address. Gustavsson, the predominant authority on the Bangladeshi primary education system, shows in Primary education in Bangladesh: For whom? that in Bangladesh no strong political will or national consensus has emerged to achieve the task of revamping the formal education system. This absence of a strong political will to pressure the government to improve the education system relates to the lack of a democratic access to good education and the absence of a powerful voice demanding that it be created.

Middle class parents, collectively the most influential segment of society, have no desire to send their children to schools which cater to a socially mixed population. Therefore, the voice which is normally considered as pressuring the government for better access to universal primary education does not endorse such a view. In addition, the state is in no way committed to change the hierarchical structure of society. The state has taken a pledge to realize education for all, yet it is

\(^{17}\) ABEL Report, p. 179
clear that there is no commitment to the equality of opportunities that education could provide.

Attitudinal misconceptions held by those in authority that the poor fail to understand or value the virtues of an education is another concern. This is a reflection of in-built prejudices harboured by many about the economically disadvantaged. Poverty is not synonymous with lack of awareness. In the context of education, it is all too frequently synonymous with lack of access. The main obstacle in achieving universal primary education, Blanchet argues, may not lie with shortages of money and resources, but rather in the acquiescence of the whole society to child labour and the low commitment to sending poor children to school. The success of universal primary education requires the widespread acceptance that all children have a right to go to school by all members of the samaj and that parents and employers have the obligation to send them to school. It is also important to recognize that even in the formal sector, such as employment in the garment industry, the ability to read and write does not automatically translate into better job opportunities. Unless education is seen to provide opportunities for job advancement, the temptation to dismiss it as the prerogative of the rich becomes very strong.\(^{38}\)

The attitudinal response regarding working children in Bangladesh is important to mention as a distinction is made among professionals and

\(^{38}\) Sobhan, 1990, p. 8
government officials between children as 'hands' and children as 'minds.' While middle class parents give considerable importance to the school performance of their own children, they do not allow poor children who work as servants in their homes to attend school at all. For these poor children, a home-based religious education, which reinforces attitudes of subservience and does not reduce hours of work, is deemed appropriate and was mentioned by several of my interviewees who employ children in their own homes. Therefore, slum children, factory workers, maid servants, and children of brothel workers, in particular, remain outside of the formal school system.

Another contributing factor to the limits of the formal primary education system concerns the inability of the Ministry of Education to keep track of their figures regarding the numbers of children enrolled in government schools. While attending the August conference on "Universal Primary Education In Bangladesh" in Dhaka, the Joint Secretary, Mr. A.H.M. Sadiquill Haq clearly manipulated his figures so as to give the appearance that the GOB had succeeded in reaching its target of over 80% attendance in primary education. The deceit is uncovered once one considers how many of these so-called enrolled students drop-out, or fail in the early years of school. The numbers look very different indeed by the end of class III. The GOB has not taken drop-outs or any other failure into consideration.

Interestingly, the GOB has not, until recently, taken the non-formal educational

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39 Remarks made by Dr. Hossain, Ph.D in Education, employed in the Joint Secretary's office at the department of Primary and Mass Education Division at the Ministry of Education, GOB. Interview notes, by Suzanne Scott, July 31st, 1996.
40 Notes taken by Suzanne Scott at the "Universal Primary Education" Conference, Dhaka, August, 1996.
programs of BRAC into serious consideration, although it does incorporate the numbers of children reached by primary schooling into its statistical base. In general, the government shows little concern to try to understand what is happening to children who are not in school, and there is a concern amongst the NGO community of the government’s manipulation of data so as not to “lose face.”

In August 1996 a conference on universal primary education in Bangladesh organized by BRAC and the GOB Ministry of Education was held in Dhaka. It was a formal success insofar as the then newly elected Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina addressed the opening ceremony with a speech pledging her support of BRAC’s non-formal education efforts and restating the commitment her party, the Awami League, to compulsory, free, quality education. If implemented, such a pledge promises a new wave of continued support and emphasis on the restructuring of the budget and expertise in the area of education.

The conference featured a presentation by a Sri Lankan educator, Upali Sedere, who emphasized the need for Bangladesh to encourage more cooperation between NGOs and government in order for the marginalised cohort of children to be reached. The major gap identified was the lack of coordination between the formal and nonformal system of education. The head researcher from BIDS supported this contention by suggesting that if more interaction could take place between formal and non-formal schools, duplication could be avoided. He criticized the headmasters of formal schools as behaving like “machines of civil
servants, not like agents of social change." In addition, the PMED was criticized as not accommodating field level visits, leading to an inability to admit weaknesses in the development of a universal primary education program.

It should be mentioned that several types of institutions have been allowed to flourish alongside the regular government schools; these include private kindergartens, English medium schools for the middle class, army and cadet schools for the meritorious elite, Madrasahs (Moslem religious schools) for rural and lower middle class boys, and non-governmental schools for poor children, mostly girls. The state’s sponsorship or tolerance of these institutions has more to do with political expediency than with a vision as to how the children of Bangladesh should be educated.

The Non-Formal System - Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and Gonoshahajjo Sangstha (GSS)

Bangladesh is well-known for its indigenous non-governmental organizations (NGOs), particularly the Grameen Bank, headed by Professor Muhammad Yunus, and the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) founded by Dr. Fazle Abed in 1974. NGOs in Bangladesh, especially BRAC, have achieved remarkable results in the field of non-formal primary education (NFPE). BRAC’s primary education model is based on providing a three year basic literacy

\[\text{From notes taken by Suzanne Scott at Conference on Universal Primary Education in Bangladesh, August, 6, 1996.}\]
and numeracy program for children, especially girls, who remain unreached by the formal school system. In fact, the stress on gender sensitivity is illustrated in the fact that 60% of the students are girls. BRAC’s approach to teacher training is distinctive, as the mostly female paraprofessional teachers receive only fifteen days of training, yet they can effectively provide primary level instruction in return for a small stipend. Significant parent and teacher involvement and effective school management has proved an effective development priority. In 1997, BRAC has over 50,000 non-formal primary education schools nationwide serving 1.5 million children. BRAC’s main innovation, in Bangladeshi and global terms, is its design of a low-cost, rapidly replicable education model that reaches the most disadvantaged children.

According to a case study of BRAC financed by USAID, UNICEF and the Rockefeller Foundation in 1993, BRAC students who complete the three year school program were scoring equally or higher than formal school students on basic education assessment and basic literacy tests. With respect to the shortcomings of the formal system, it can be argued that BRAC schools are substantially more cost-efficient per graduate than the GOB’s formal schools, not to mention transformative in their gender awareness.

One of the key factors to BRAC’s success has been a willingness to adjust and provide flexible learning environments to cater to the other demands on students’ time. In rural NFPE schools, the class schedules allow children to continue to assist

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*ABEL report 1993, p. 100
*State of the World’s Children Report, 1997, p. 60
in normal duties, such as the harvesting chores. In urban areas, certain NGOs have instituted special shifts in the morning and late in the evening to enable children who work in formal sector jobs to attend classes either before or after work. The NGOs stress the importance of access and the need to locate schools in an area that is most convenient to the students."

BRAC's decentralized management model provides effective administrative and logistical support for the curriculum and pedagogic approach. There are however, some difficulties in defining the areas of nonformal and formal education as "the concept of non-formality is not clearly defined by the organizations themselves." For example, great differences mark out respective target groups, whether they may be street children, working children, or children in slums. These distinctions are important in order to understand the difference and potential for various NFPE programs. Of great importance is how BRAC views its relationship to the GOB system of education. According to the ABEL Report, BRAC sees the NFPE program as a "stop-gap measure"- useful until a more permanent, government system is in place; it does not view BRAC schools as a long-term substitute for the formal system. Despite tremendous efforts made by the nonformal education system, non-formal education is still unfortunately considered synonymous with 'inferior' education, even given an ample and growing body of evidence to the contrary.

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44 Bissell and Sobhan, 1996, p. 28
45 Sobhan, 1995, p. 5
46 ibid, p. 5
Another successful indigenous NGO known for its efforts in NFPE expansion is the other implementing agency in the MOU project. The Gonoshahajjo Sangstha organization is similar to BRAC although not nearly as expansive. GSS was founded in 1983 with the objective of enhancing the capacity of the poor to attain self-sufficiency through education and social welfare. GSS employs a staff of 2100 and has three main programmes, social mobilization, development, and education and advocacy. GSS has moved into a new phase of operations from July 1994, involving a budget of approximately US $50 million over the next three years. The success of GSS primary schools is their innovative methodology and curriculum both of which emphasize low cost and the use of local resources. The fundamental difference between the formal system and the GSS methodology is the emphasis on developing a flexible learning environment that addresses the learning needs of the individual student. Active learning is the emphasis contributing to the enjoyment of the child's learning. GSS and BRAC teachers have a similar 15 day period of training and monthly refresher courses.

In the MOU program, GSS will arrange to provide education for 5,000 children but it has the capacity to absorb up to 12,000 children. Because of the relative maturity of the older target group, GSS envisages these children being able to cover three academic years at a GSS school bringing them up to the government standard of class V. The children will be taught in groups of 25 to 30 in each class by one teacher. The classes for the garment workers will be held exclusively for them. One significant difference between BRAC and GSS schools is the policy of GSS to
construct schools on lands donated by the community, rather than rent premises. But due to the short duration of the MOU schools project, GSS will rent buildings to run their schools. During this time it is their policy that the building will be used for GSS schools and not for any other purpose and that the classroom layout be sustained as it is an important part of GSS methodology. The budget cost for financing this school project is US $36 per child per year.48

BRAC and GSS as the operators of the MOU schools face enormous difficulties in addressing the educational needs of working children. Given BRAC’s institutional capacity, it is better equipped than most other NGOs to address the scaling up of this project. GSS is innovative and well-established, but it has found difficulties in financing the capital costs associated with obtaining land and maintaining and constructing its own schools. In addition, the hours of the GSS schools are not geared specifically for children working in the formal sector.

The best curriculum ideas for non-formal primary schools for child labourers avoid middle class biases of the government textbooks. As opposed to the formal system of education, characterized by rote learning and strict discipline, BRAC and GSS limit classroom size, and address the specific needs of the child in a sympathetic learning environment. One of the concerns for the urban NFPE programs at BRAC and GSS is the lack of sustained parental interest and follow-up. Unfortunately there will always be a percentage of children who simply stop going to school and who will remain beyond the reach of even the most well designed outreach

48 GSS Education File from UNICEF Education Section files, letter to UNICEF Education section, Jan, 1996 from Programme Head of Education at GSS.
This chapter has examined childhood and education within a distinct cultural context, detailing the anthropological origins of childhood and the politicization of the education system in Bangladesh. Poor, working children are stigmatized by the middle class as not desiring or even valuing an education. Attitudinal misconceptions of the poor are in fact deep-rooted alliances to the order of society according to the internal dynamics of the *samaj*. The less than desirable education system in Bangladesh, combined with a harsh economic reality has forced most working children into exploitative conditions, but the NFPE programs of BRAC and GSS provide alternatives to the formal system for working children. The success of these NGO school programs is due to their flexible, child-centered approach to learning and their goal of delivering high quality low-cost education to the poorest of the poor. The following chapter looks at child labour more closely and outlines the root causes of child labour in the context of the Bangladeshi political economy, specifically the garment industry.
CHAPTER THREE

Child Labour and the Political Economy of Bangladesh

"Under no circumstances can poverty be used as an excuse for children obliged to work to have their physical integrity assaulted, their intellectual development impaired and their dignity flouted."

Child labour: What is to be done? ILO Document, June 1996

This chapter examines the general root causes of child labour and then more specifically with respect to the ready made garment sector in urban Bangladesh. The major UNICEF and ILO definitions of 'labour' and 'work' are presented and contrasted with studies of actual working families conducted by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS). An investigation into the political economy of Bangladesh is provided with particular emphasis on the new liberalized global economy and how it relates to the child labour problem. A discussion of foreign aid dependency is linked to a profile of the Bangladeshi entrepreneurial class. The importance of the garment industry for the Bangladeshi economy is stressed as is its dependence on the United States export market. A clear understanding of the garment industry is necessary in order to follow the MOU negotiation process and to determine the interconnectedness of major political and economic interests.

Child labour reflects the fundamental dilemma of balancing and reconciling apparently conflicting basic needs as well as raising the question of the locus of
definition for those needs and for whom. On the one hand, child labour is essential for a child’s immediate and long-term survival in certain situations where such labour also constitutes a vital vehicle for education and socialization. On the other hand, the nature and circumstances of labour threaten the physical and mental health of children and deprive them of their basic needs, including education. This dilemma affects those working to end hazardous child labour as they differ on how best to proceed. Some believe that labour is damaging to children and has to be eradicated. They contend that it is an abuse of civil and political human rights so fundamental that it must simply be outlawed without compromise. Others see hazardous child labour as primarily an abuse of social and economic human rights. While just as committed to its eradication in the long term, proponents of this view focus concern on protecting children at work, rather than liberating them into conceivably more dangerous circumstances such as street life and the possibilities of working as child prostitutes or elsewhere in the informal sector.¹

3.1 Differences between ‘work’ and ‘labour’

The perception that child labour is a logical outcome of poverty, a necessary survival strategy for the child and the family, has perpetuated over the years a policy view that child labour is in the best interests of low-income children. The argument of the child’s “interest” in working has masked a reluctance to move children out of

the labour force, allocate more resources for primary education, and replace children with adult and female labour. In order to understand the legalities involved, it is important to seek an understanding of what is meant in international legislation by the words "child," "labour," and "work."

Quite apart from the UNCRC, worldwide concern with child labour has resulted in the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Minimum Age Convention 138 of 1973 which commits ratifying countries to seek the abolition of child labour and to raise the minimum age for admission to employment or work to a level consistent with the full physical and mental development of children. According to UNICEF and ILO guidelines, as codified in various international conventions, a distinction is made between "work" and "labour." An environment wherein a child is engaged in "light" work - activities which are neither hazardous nor exploitative, is considered 'work' rather than 'labour,' and therefore is acceptable. Hazards which are physical or psycho-social threaten the development of the children’s minds and bodies. Exploitation is similarly detrimental and may be as overt as when labour deprives a child of access to school, or opportunities for play and recreation. More covertly, exploitative circumstances are, for instance, those in which children perform tasks considered too menial, difficult or dangerous for adults.

Work may have positive aspects to it, particularly when it affords children the opportunity to learn a specific skill. From their work, children can also learn

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2 ILO Convention 138
about responsibility, both fiscal and familial. They learn to value productivity and economic activity.\(^3\) That not all child labour is harmful is reflected in ILO Convention 138 and Article 32 of the UNCRC. In particular, the thrust of Article 32 is to eliminate all exploitative forms of labour, while permitting children between the ages of 12-14 to undertake light work in keeping with the standards laid down in ILO Convention 138. The 1973 ILO Convention No. 138 on Minimum Age was initially designed to replace previous conventions with a view to achieving the total abolition of child labour and to help governments define and implement national policies for the effective abolition of child labour.\(^4\)

### 3.2 ILO Minimum Age Convention Number 138

The International Labour Organization’s Convention No. 138 of 1973 commits ratifying countries “to seek the abolition of child labour and to raise the minimum age for admission to employment or work consistent with the full physical and mental development of children.”\(^5\) In recognition of the unequal socio-economic development between countries, the ILO Convention also provides room for flexibility, stating in Article 5 that a member state whose economy and administrative facilities are insufficiently developed may initially limit the scope of application of this Convention. In Article 7 this is further articulated by stressing the notion of “light” work which is not harmful to the health of children and does

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\(^3\) Bissell and Sobhan, 1996, p. 25

\(^4\) Bailey-Wiebecke, and Rahman, 1996, p. 54

\(^5\) See Appendix for ILO and UNCRC Convention excerpts
not obstruct them from attending school.

The ILO Minimum Age Convention broadly adopts different age-related legislation, allowing light work at age 12 or 13, but hazardous work not before 18. Nevertheless, the ILO also establishes a general minimum age of 15 years for work - provided 15 is not less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling. This is the most widely used yardstick when establishing how many children are currently working around the world.* However, Article 5 of the ILO Convention appears to contradict this flexibility by stating that the minimum age shall not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling, and in any case, shall not be less than 15 years. To complicate matters further, the UNCRC, Article 1, specifies that a child refers to every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority may be attained earlier. Article 32 from the UNCRC ties all these key points together by stating that;

"States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development."

3.3 IPEC

The International Program for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), the

child labour branch of the ILO, is a relatively new administrative department and

Note: Bangladesh is not a signatory to the ILO Convention 138.
financed mostly by the German Government. IPEC seeks to utilize legal, educational, economic and welfare interventions to end child labour, and it mobilizes both public and private-sector resources to reach its goals. IPEC has adopted a pro-active approach based on real political and social determination to combat child labour. IPEC mobilizes at the grass roots level the forces best placed to translate principle into practice: the governments, employers' organizations and workers as well as NGOs in the field.

The IPEC program has been in operation since the beginning of 1993. The immediate objectives of the program are: i) to improve the capability of member States to design and implement policies and program which would help manage the problem of child labour and the protection of working children; and ii) to heighten the awareness of member states and the international community as a whole as to the dimensions and consequences of child labour and national obligations under international labour law. The future implications of IPEC programs can lead to the eventual insertion of child labour concerns into development policies and programs such as the MOU. The close links of child labour to poverty, education system failures, gender discrimination and other key obstacles to overall economic and social development demand that child labour be introduced as an important consideration in the planning of overall development policies and programs.\(^7\)

In recognition of the unequal socio-economic development between

\(^7\) See ILO Document, 1996
countries, the ILO Convention provides room for flexibility, stating in Article 5 that a member state whose economy and administrative facilities are insufficiently developed may initially limit the scope of application of this Convention. In Article 7, this is further articulated by stressing the notion of "light" work which is not harmful to the health of children and does not obstruct them from attending school. In Article 5, the ILO Convention appears to contradict this flexibility, stating that the minimum age shall not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling, and in any case, shall not be less than 15 years. To complicate matters further, Article 1 of the UNCRC clarifies that a child refers to every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

A major shortcoming of ILO Convention 138 is that "it does not set priorities for national action, but leaves this to the competent authorities in each country." It does not specify what priorities should be given to measures geared to preventing children from finding themselves in work situations that jeopardize their development or are contrary to human rights, to withdrawing immediately those who are already in such situations and to ensure that they do not return to such work. The Convention allows for the exclusion of certain branches of activity from the application of its provisions, yet these possibilities do not appear to reflect adequately the concern to target national efforts primarily on the most intolerable forms of child labour.

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8 ILO Document. 1996, p. 28
The Government of Bangladesh has a number of important pieces of legislation which outlaw child labour in the factory environment under the age of fourteen. In particular, the Factories Act of 1963 states that the employment of any child under the age of fourteen is illegal. Nevertheless, the ILO also establishes a general minimum age of 15 years for work - provided 15 is not less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling. This is the most widely used yardstick when establishing how many children are currently working around the world.

3.4 Root Causes of Child Labour in Bangladesh

The 1997 publication of the UNICEF State of the World’s Children Report identified three general root causes of child labour in the world; the exploitation of poverty, the absence of education, and the restrictions of tradition. The limitations of the education system have been detailed in the previous chapter. This chapter provides a more complex discussion of additional causes of child labour specific to the garment industry in Bangladesh. In rural Bangladesh, poverty and natural disasters have resulted in a constant flow of migrants to urban areas. Between 1981 and 1991 according to the UNICEF report, the urban population of Bangladesh grew by 5 per cent a year - one of the highest urban growth rates in Asia. Compounding the situation is that the majority of urban slum dwellers are confined to informal sector employment and earn less than the basic minimum wage: some 30 per cent of

households in Dhaka alone are living in virtual starvation.\footnote{Boyden and Myers, 1994, p. 52}

According to their research, Bissell and Sobhan estimate the approximate numbers of working children between the ages of 6 and 10 in Bangladesh to be 13 million, with approximately 8 million working children aged 10 to 14. The difficulty in obtaining exact figures is that much of this labour is confined to small-scale and informal family work-places, which cannot be reached easily by private sector initiatives. For poor families, the small contribution of a child's income that allows both parents to work can make the difference between hunger and bare sufficiency and with such a massive concentration of some of the world's poorest people, Bangladesh is heavily reliant on child labour. Often the parents of child labourers are unemployed or underemployed, desperate for a secure employment and income. Yet ironically enough they are not offered jobs; rather, jobs are available only for their children. Why is this so? The simple answer is that children can be paid less and that they will do what they are told. Because children are malleable, docile and powerless, they are less likely to organize against exploitation and can be physically abused without being able to strike back. Furthermore, no formal system of monitoring factories by the Ministry of Labour and Manpower exists, and supervisors are easily bribed. Without accompanying parents or relatives to the factory or sweatshop, children would otherwise remain unsupervised in the slums.

Despite these bleak descriptions of the processes in place which promote child labour, there is a way of gradually eliminating the impetus towards total loss of
childhood. One way is to attack child labour at its traditional cultural roots. This way, action is forced to take place at the local levels of society where decisions are made about whether and where children will work or whether and how their labour will be used. Most of these decisions happen in a highly decentralized way - in families and local communities. Lest this long-term goal of gradual cultural transformation appear too ambitious, it is worth noting impressive cases such as the southern Indian state of Kerala.

The impressive scenario in Kerala demonstrates that even in the midst of poverty, it is possible to build a popular culture that demands and expects the universal education of all children. This case also implies, according to Boyden and Myers, that the way to change the culture of child protection, particularly in regard to child labour, "is through a strategy of social mobilization involving the participation of both its governmental and non-governmental elements."" They are also of the opinion that it is easier to persuade families and communities of the practical need that children require their protection against threats to safety and development such as exhaustion, accidents, or lack of schooling, than it is to convince them of the abstract and counter-intuitive position that all work below a standard age is wrong.""2

A study by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) in 1993 identifies two broad cohorts of children working in garment factories - one aged between 6 and 11 years and another, older group between 12-14. The study suggests

" Boyden and Myers. 1994, p. 71
" ibid
that one common point of entry for younger child workers into the garment industry is a lack of adequate child care facilities within the community. This is a particular problem faced by recent migrants to urban areas "where the traditional ties and networks that act as social support systems in so many rural communities are not as well-developed." And as in so many parts of the world, these women have to juggle the dual commitments of full-time employment and child-care. Over time, it appears that many of the children accompanying mothers or elder siblings to work drift into casual labour positions, working usually as helpers and packers, often at the behest of the parents themselves. Often the child labourers are girls who accompany their mothers to the garment factory as it is safer for them to be working alongside their mothers than to be home alone. In a predominantly Muslim country, it is neither safe nor socially acceptable for girls to be alone at any time.

In the BIDS case study of the older group of children, significant differences emerged. While still below the legal age for employment, most had been active participants in the work-force for some time. For many of these "hard core child workers," employment in a garment factory is the culmination of a journey that began in part-time work in the informal sector. This is a good example of where reality forcing a re-examination of the most basic assumptions about children, education, and work. To assume that a child who has been working for several years, who most likely associates only negative experiences with schooling, would

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13 Boyden and Myers, 1994, p. 8
14 Bissell and Sobhan, 1996, p. 9
gladly leave work and re-enter school is unreasonable. Of more immediate concern for such a child would be the need to replace their lost income even if that meant accepting more hazardous or exploitative work elsewhere.

Majumdar-Paul and Chowdhuri in their study of women in the garment industry reveal that the vast majority of these women work as machine operators and earn in the region of Taka 600 to Taka 1200 a month (US$15-30), whereas better-paid managerial positions such as line managers still tend to be held by men. It is common for garment workers to work over-time as a matter of course. When delivery shipments are due, women and girls work around the clock to meet production deadlines. In a situation such as this, the lack of adequate child care facilities is a serious problem especially for mothers with young children. Yet, jobs in garment factories are coveted. They are considered prestigious and comparatively well paying by the vast numbers of unskilled and semi-skilled unemployed or underemployed workers in low-wage countries.

The garment industry has had a profoundly positive impact on the status of women in Bangladesh. In a conservative milieu, employment in the garment industry is one of the few ways to earn a livelihood that is considered socially acceptable for women. It is clean work, inside work and done in the company of other women. Moreover, with tight security, which also can be dangerous when there is an emergency, the factories are relatively safe for female workers who find reassurance in numbers, traveling to and from work in large groups. At present

Paul-Majumdar and Chaudhuri, 1992, p. 23
close to 80% of the industry’s one million workers are women.\textsuperscript{16}

From a policy perspective, the link between the employment of women in the garment industry, the lack of adequate child care facilities and child labour illustrates how legislation focused only on one aspect of the problem cannot hope to succeed. Part of the complex problem lies in the conditions of employment and the complete lack of effective bargaining power on the part of workers in the private sector. This denial of worker rights leads to the conditions which force children to labour. Bissell and Sobhan confirm this situation to be the case in Bangladesh by stating that "by law, factories employing more than 50 workers are required to provide child care facilities on site, but the enforcement of such labour laws is poor to non-existent."\textsuperscript{17}

The politicization of child labour has special relevance to Canada because of the remarkable efforts of a Canadian child by the name of Craig Kielburger who has singlehandedly managed to turn the attention of the Canadian Prime Minister, and through him, the Canadian media, to the plight of exploited working children in the developing world. He has reminded us of the potential for children’s participation in these issues. His self-made NGO named "Free the Children" has been very largely successful, if sometimes controversial, in its leadership on these issues. His forthright views have come into conflict with the milder manner of child welfare agencies like UNICEF. Craig Kielburger takes the view that any form

\textsuperscript{16} ibid
\textsuperscript{17} Bissell and Sobhan, 1996, p. 7
of child labour is wrong and that all governments, particularly the Government of Canada, should play a greater role in improving the lives of these children.¹⁸

UNICEF by contrast, has tried through the ‘best interests’ principle in the UNCRC to implement educational programs which aid in the gradual elimination of child labour and, with the ILO, work towards improving the working conditions of children where cruel exploitation and systematic abuse are not present. UNICEF does not see a comprehensive ban of child labour as in the best interests of working children.

Although there has been negative media coverage regarding false claims that UNICEF in fact endorses child labour by not agreeing to ban it outright, Kielburger and his young organization seem to be coming to terms with the way the development business is run.¹⁴ In 1997 Free The Children adopted a similar approach to that articulated by the UNICEF MOU schools program, namely that through the affiliated Rugmark program, schools in India are being registered so as to provide working children in the carpet industry a chance at receiving basic education.

3.5 The Political Economy of Bangladesh

Dependence on foreign aid: consequences for trade and the education system

The Bangladeshi economy can be characterized by a heavy dependence on

¹⁸ Kielburger, Free the Children pamphlet, 1996
¹⁴ Vincent, Saturday Night Magazine, November, 1996
foreign aid. Widespread endemic poverty is one of the defining characteristics of Bangladesh and recognized as such by the people of Bangladesh. This has far-reaching consequences. According to Blanchet, aid dependency forces Bangladesh to subscribe to objectives defined by donors and as a result, the Bangladeshi state does not and need not carry out its own independent appraisal of its own needs. Adopting donors' plans and objectives with money attached provides the government with ready-made programs and objectives as well as improved budgets. Thus, there need not be a deep political commitment to goals such as increased spending in the area of education or poverty alleviation or even an understanding of them.  

The danger of a lack of general political will to transform society, Blanchet warns, is that "poverty becomes a kind of resource in itself, indirectly encouraged, and promoted to ensure a continual flow of resources ... and the promotion of 'ideological actors' - 'women', 'the poor', 'poor children' are used to attract sympathy and funds." Unfortunately, Blanchet feels that there appears to be a strong incentive on the part of the government to continue fabricating categories of such passive people in need of aid which in turn discourages people to act independently. At the same time as the Bangladeshi state continues to receive aid money, it also tries to attract foreign investment to develop industries which necessitates the construction of a different image of the country: of untapped resources, cheap labour and tax benefits. The effect of poorly managed economic decisions has led to the

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20 Blanchet, 1996, p. 196
21 ibid, p. 195
misallocation of scarce resources such as education and should not be overlooked.

Karen Mundy’s doctoral dissertation offers the most detailed literature review regarding those who view aid, particularly educational assistance, as operating to reproduce rather than to alleviate inequality and poverty. She suggests that Carnoy, Altbach, Mazrui, and Arnove believe that educational assistance should be seen as part of a broader process of neo-imperialism and dependency. They argue that educational aid did not contribute to equitable social change, but rather “disguised the underlying causes of dependency while reproducing the national and international division of labour necessary for the reproduction of capitalism.” In other words, the enormous influence of the World Bank’s policies and Bank-influenced donor interventions in education in third world countries is evidence that educational assistance is fundamentally linked to the interests of advanced capitalist states, whose main objective is “the unfettered expansion of a capitalist world economy.”

Despite these well-argued academic arguments, Mundy contends that one cannot view the evolution of development assistance policies and practices simply as completely tied to imperatives of domestic or international capitalism. She senses that there is a need to integrate organization-level dynamics and individual agency into a broader image of aid and its relationship to the state. Her goal is to “explore the way in which educational needs have been defined and shaped through complex discursive and institutional practices and better understand the

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22 Mundy, 1996, p. 8
23 Ibid. p. 9
Heissler extends this analysis by assessing political and economic conditions at the macroeconomic level and shows how they have affected the export garment industry, by using examples of the situation in Bangladesh. Her premise is that striving towards the elimination of child labour requires the concerted efforts of a global, multi-faceted approach. Otherwise production will shift to other more exploitative economies. In regard to the MOU, she argues that "by attempting to abolish child labour in one sector of the economy, without addressing the underlying socio-economic and cultural reasons why they are working, the problem is often pushed further underground, forcing children into less visible and more exploitable types of employment." Heissler would agree with the arguments brought forth in Mundy's dissertation by suggesting that the dependency argument applies to the situation of child labour to the extent that in the export garment industry, large corporations, identified by Heissler as the "core," retain the power, capital and technology to make and change the rules of production, whereas the smaller "peripheral" subcontractors lack the money, technology and skilled workforce in order to become equal partners, thus reinstating the dependency argument.

However assistance for universal primary education is arranged, it needs to be increased if there are to be significant gains in the child labour field. According to

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ibid, p. 11
Heissler, 1995, p. 10
ibid, p. 17
a speech given by Dr. Guido Bertolas, Deputy Director of External Relations of UNICEF at the International Child Labour Subcommittee of the U.S. Senate Committee on Labour and Human Resources in 1994, only about 9% of overseas development assistance (ODA) is directed to education in Third World countries; of that amount, less than a quarter is devoted to basic education. Trade sanctions are also considered as a tool to combat child labour, and could only make a change in the life of child workers if they were taken in the framework of genuine integrated national and international strategies to fight against poverty, social injustice, and for the rights of workers, with the participation of workers themselves.

3.6 Private Sector Initiatives: the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

There is no question that the garment industry is of critical importance as an earner of foreign exchange in Bangladesh. The ready-made garment export industry stands alone as the only billion dollar (in gross terms) manufacturing and export industry in the country.\footnote{Quddus, 1993, p. 1} It has pumped billions of dollars into the overall economy and is also responsible in part for a change in demographics and changing women's work roles, particularly their accessibility to a socially sanctioned work environment and for making women economic earners.

Bangladesh is one of the world's major garment exporters and the largest
supplier of shirts to the European Union. In 1993, total export sales reached $1.4 billion, with more than 50% of Bangladesh's total export earnings coming from trade with the United States alone. By the end of 1992, there were around 1,500 factories manufacturing garments for export, employing more than 750,000 people, over 10% of whom were children aged under 14. Most of these children are girls in early adolescence with little or no education who come from poor families, many of whom are themselves dependent on the industry for work. However, rising exports do not mean equivalent foreign exchange earnings and have been insufficient to overcome chronic trade deficits that have become a permanent feature of Bangladesh's foreign trade.

The Asian Development Bank country economic review of Bangladesh for October, 1996 states that export earnings from the ready-made garments and knitwear industry amounted to over $2.5 billion or 66% of total export earnings during 1995/96. However, the growth of the garment sector is unlikely to be as impressive as it has been because of new trade arrangements in multilateral trade negotiations. One of the problems facing the garments sector as reported by the Asian Development Bank is the low domestic value added, as only 5% of fabrics used by the garments sector is locally produced. The industry requires an improvement in quality and price competitiveness and consistent availability of locally produced fabrics. Weakness in the internal infrastructure is also a major constraint for the development of the industry. Power failures averaging 3 to 4

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*Boyden and Myers, 1994, p. 53*

*Asian Development Bank Report, 1996, p. 5*
hours daily hamper production. In addition, administrative bottlenecks upset production further. The Asian Development Bank report predicts that “the garments sector will probably face very tough competition once quota restrictions are withdrawn and tariffs further liberalized in the post-Gatt era.”

In effect, an abundant supply of cheap labour is Bangladesh’s only asset in this industry, since much of the technical know-how, the capital equipment, the management teams, the fabric, thread, buttons, zippers and rivets come from outside the country. Because of the industry’s importance to Bangladesh and its precarious situation, extreme sensitivity surrounds any development, political or economic, national or international, that might threaten it. Dependence on the North American market is particularly marked and therefore susceptibility to policy change in the United States particularly acute.

In order to compete in future aggressive quota-free markets, the Bangladeshi garment industry cannot rely solely on cheap labour. Unless the garment sector can diversify its product lines and build a track record of good labour management relations in the industries, direct foreign investment will not be forthcoming. It has, however, been argued by Broad and Cavanagh that the success of newly industrialized countries like Hong Kong and Taiwan cannot be easily emulated by nations like Bangladesh because there has been a glut created in the economy, offering little room for Bangladesh. The emergence of what Broad and Cavanagh term “newly industrialized country rivalry” has resulted in the battle among the

\[\text{ibid}\]
\[\text{ibid}\]
\[\text{ibid}\]
developing world economies to provide the cheapest labour force in order to attract foreign investment. Heissler argues that it is because of these deliberate attempts by developed world economies to introduce subcontracting enterprises which accounts for the dramatic increases in child labourers as many export-driven enterprises use the subcontracting system to avoid implementing national labour laws.

Quddus’s study of the profile of the entrepreneurial class in the Bangladeshi garment industry reveals that some of the best entrepreneurial talent in Bangladesh is engaged in this industry. He discusses how apparel manufacturing is risky and fairly complicated, demanding motivation and constant supervision, as mistakes can lead to severe losses. He reveals that the representation within this “entrepreneurial class” includes members of the elite middle class, individuals from various ‘respected’ professions, university professors, army generals, and ex-secretaries (i.e. permanent heads of government departments). The industry’s association, the BGMEA, exercises strong political clout and includes members from all the major political parties. The danger exists that since industry usually gets its way with the ministries, narrow industry interests may win over national interests whenever there is a conflict between the two. Its long-time head, Redwan Ahmed, actually served briefly as a minister in the government of former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia from April to June 1996.

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20 Broad and Cavanagh, 1988, p. 85
34 See Quddus, 1993
Weaknesses in the industry include the lack of a managerial class. Most of the small and medium firms remain 'one man shows,' unable to develop a cadre of capable managers who can operate the business without direct control by the managing director. Many of the owners and entrepreneurs know little about the production aspect of business and have little contact with the workers. In addition, most owners are not interested in innovation or training of their supervisors or managers. Nor have most owners considered the corporation form of business, primarily due to a misplaced distrust of shareholders and a well-judged mistrust of tax authorities. They prefer to remain independent even if it means not expanding, as on the whole, tax evasion carries no social stigma in Bangladesh.

Many of the garment factories are joint-ownership enterprises with foreigners contributing much of the capital and taking much of the profit. In the modern global economy, capital is extremely mobile and large firms can respond to shifts in wage rates or political instability with great speed. If the climate for production in Bangladesh were to deteriorate, or a cheaper labour market were to emerge elsewhere, foreign owners and buyers could pull out at short notice with no, or only marginal, cost to themselves.

It should be noted here that the problems faced by Bangladesh’s working children are not unique. In fact UNICEF India is working with a broad range of partners on a promising proposed strategy to eliminate exploitative labour in a phased manner as is the case in Egypt and Brazil, the Philippines, and Kenya. The Rugmark “child labour-free trademark” initiative in India has mobilized the
private sector to certify voluntarily that no exploitative child labour has occurred in
the production of such articles. The Rugmark program supports the transition of
child workers into educational projects.

Criticisms of the Rugmark project similar to those of the MOU schools project
have been voiced from several quarters. Surprise factory checks on factories in
India and Nepal are not foolproof. The potential for corruption is obvious, quite
apart from the difficulty of inspecting thousands of looms in what is essentially a
widely decentralized cottage industry. In addition, the pressing need to ensure that
children identified by inspectors are placed in educational programmes and do not
return to the looms cannot be easily addressed by such programs. When Rugmark-
Nepal begins its operation in 1997, it will focus on the twin operations of inspecting
looms, as well as on ensuring that children released from the looms are placed
immediately in schools and not left to fend for themselves in risky situations. As of
September 1996, 30 large manufacturers, representing 70% of Nepal’s carpet exports,
have committed to obtaining Rugmark licences. The hope is that Rugmark and
similar incentives will be seen as a marketing opportunity. But the carpet industry
in Bangladesh is almost entirely a highly centralized affair based on the industrial
processing of jute, and Rugmark issues are of little consequence.

3.7 International trade negotiations and their affect on the garment industry

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35 This aspect was explored by CBC Radio on Jan 28, 1997
36 State of the World's Children, 1997, p. 67
Much attention has been paid to accomplishments of the Bangladeshi private sector in reducing child labour. This debate has encouraged discussion within developing countries that produce goods for export through multi-national firms whether trading partners and subsidiaries in the global market have special responsibilities to introduce and sustain international standards with regard to worker rights and working conditions.37

The Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA) signed in 1974 imposes quantitative restrictions on apparel exports, under which category-specific quotas are imposed on individual exporting countries. Much of the impetus for trade reform has come from the United States. Even since the mid-1950's the Americans have been proposing that an "unfair labour clause," now known as a "social clause," to ensure the application internationally of fair labour standards, be added to the GATT agreement. In 1994, World Trade Ministers gathered in Morocco to sign the agreement reached during the seven-year Uruguay round of trade talks. The agreement specifies that the new World Trade Organization (successor to the GATT) should at a later date examine how labour standards and workers' rights will affect trade rules. Child labour is one of the issues to be covered.38

Developing countries argue, however, that such a 'social clause' would stifle the development of low-wage countries by depriving them of their main comparative advantage in international trade. Religious, consumer, environmental and human rights groups are taking more direct measures to

37 Boyden and Myers, 1994, p. 53
* ibid, p. 54
influence transnationals, pressuring them to adopt, for themselves and their subcontractors, codes of conduct for operators in poorer countries.39 The controversy over child labour in the Bangladesh garment industry illustrates just how critical a role the private sector can play - especially in an era of declining foreign aid. Negotiators seeking to phase out child labour soon realized that the industry would be a major partner - on everything from financing school programs to monitoring compliance with labour standards.

In practice, even among industrialized countries, GATT/WTO members hold very different views on the subject. France and the United States are arguing for punitive measures to be introduced against nations which allow "social dumping," a term meant to refer to over-reliance upon low wage production inputs. Germany and the European Union, on the other hand, are concerned that such measures would undermine any competitive advantage achieved by developing countries, thereby exacerbating poverty.40

The recently concluded Uruguay round of the GATT negotiations, the imposition of social clauses in foreign aid and trade agreements, and the introduction of the Child Labour Deterrence Bill, 1993 in the United States Senate, have all had a major impact on business practices in the developing world.41 The two trends of increased child labour and the decrease in foreign aid to the "majority world" from the North are indications of the complex situation that many development practitioners are facing: the magnitude of the problems

40 ibid
41 Bissell and Sobhan, 1996, p. 1
continue to grow, yet the resources available to mitigate them are reduced.

Augmenting this acute social problem are global structural adjustment policies which slash any previously existing social services while the global economy prizes cheap labour above all else, forcing children into the workforce. The Bretton Woods institutions, namely the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank have encouraged developing countries to carry out export-led growth strategies and to open up their economies to foreign capital and investment. This has induced production units to move to where the costs of labour are the cheapest. The World Bank concludes in its 1995 report on the situation in Bangladesh that higher investment is necessary in order to foster growth and obtain better outcomes for labour, and that the government should reduce its role as a regulator of the micro economy. The report also indicates that underemployment could rise and become the equivalent of more than 30% by 2000, and that raising investment to 20% of GDP and achieving at least a 7% growth rate is the only way to reduce underemployment.

David Korten confirms this World Bank view by suggesting that "no agency has more fully epitomized the business-as-usual response to the growing social and environmental crisis than the World Bank." Such World Bank reports in Korten's experience are evidence of the Bank's continued faith in the premise that growth, development, and improved human well-being are synonymous, and that gross national product (GNP) is their measure. Because of the Bretton Woods

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42 Heissler, 1995, p. 14
43 See World Bank Report, 1995
44 Korten, 1991, p. 163
institutions, "the pressures on non-industrial countries to increase their exports of primary commodities under export-led development strategies have increased environmental [and social] stress and depressed international commodity prices."\textsuperscript{45} Korten emphasizes the point that the more prices are depressed, the terms of trade of the developing nation become worse, and the greater the pressure to export in order to maintain established levels of foreign exchange earnings. Korten argues that in this scenario, the only certain beneficiaries are the transnational corporations that dominate the international commodity trade.

In other words, given the direction which the world economy is taking, the sustainable development concerns of the BGMEA's financial participation in the reduction of child labour are serious. Heissler states that it is this mobility of international capital and the decentralization of production which has facilitated the emergence and growth of the export garment industry in developing nations like Bangladesh and that "changes in the world economy, including the increasing emphasis on multinational corporation-based industries, have led to the promotion of child labour."\textsuperscript{46}

Professor Rehman Sobhan of Dhaka University, a well-known socialist theorist, opposes opening markets because he fears Bangladesh cannot compete with China over the long run. The World Bank's reply to this is that the Bangladesh garment industry can compete if it diversifies into downstream production - cloth, thread, etc. The World Bank policy of import liberalization has

\textsuperscript{45} ibid, p. 170
\textsuperscript{46} World Bank report, p. 17
opened Bangladeshi markets to the most competitive sources of supply from abroad. According to Sobhan, the pace of Bangladesh’s advance to open up the economy is excessive in relation to the level of development.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has examined the root causes of child labour and the political economy that drives the garment industry to hire children. The economic realities for children in the slum areas of major cities mean that they stay unsupervised during their parents work day or they are brought along to the formal sector to learn the beginning skills of a trade. The assumption that a child chooses work over education out of ignorance is shown to be unfounded. It denies the very real economic constraints faced by poor families where education is perceived as a luxury when day to day survival is the goal of life. It ignores the fact that the opportunity costs of school attendance continue to be very high, and in a situation of pervasive under-employment among graduates, for apparently limited rewards. It forgives an education system that has systematically failed to address the needs of under-privileged children. The linkage between education and work that developed during the course of the MOU schools project has had a profound impact on the work of UNICEF Bangladesh. The most significant aspect of this was the impact on the Education Section. The garment industry has opened up a formal

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*ibid*
sector which is relatively safe for women and children, but it has unmonitored operations which abuse women and their children through long hours and low wages. The profile of the garment industry reveals its complexity and the difficulties in outright banning of child labour when for so many families this is their only way of survival.

This chapter proves that an intelligent discussion of child labour cannot be considered in isolation, but that it is directly related to international economic issues as determined in the GATT, and its successor organization, the WTO. Ultimately, however, the discussion must be set within an even broader context, focusing more on the children themselves - on their needs and rights. The guiding principle, as set out in the Convention, is introduced in the following chapter where an analysis is presented of the ‘rights-based’ argument that all children have access to education. It is an attempt to look beyond legalistic jargon and to make sense of how the best interests of working children in the garment industry may given concrete expression.
CHAPTER FOUR


"Ending hazardous child labour, a priority concern of the International Labour Organization and of UNICEF, now needs to become the world’s shared and urgent goal. The United Nations system must take the lead."

Boutros Boutros-Ghali, United Nations Secretary-General

Foreward to The State of the World’s Children Report, 1997

This chapter examines the theoretical implications of applying treaties such as the UNCRC to the context of child labourers in the Bangladeshi garment industry. The central part of this chapter provides a philosophical critique of the benefits and limitations of the UNCRC as an overarching global tool to ensure the best interests of children. I propose in this chapter to determine the broader relationship between culture and human rights and how this applies to the Bangladeshi context of child garment workers. The importance of human rights literature in the study of the politics of education is critical in the Bangladeshi case where the UNCRC has shaped the approach of UNICEF and the GOB to children and education. It is of particular interest in a country in the South Asian region where culture and regional specificities count for much in the interplay of the business of development. Cultural relativism regarding education and child labour is the focus here, rather than curriculum and pedagogy related to the education of child workers.
The politics of education cannot be more obvious than in the trade-offs between the key partners in the Memorandum of Understanding which was signed in 1995 by the Bangladeshi Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), UNICEF and the ILO. The trade negotiations between Bangladesh and the United States, the largest importer of Bangladeshi products, were complex in parts and tense at times. It is the contention of this thesis that until the UNCRC was used in partnership with boycott threats, Bangladesh, the twenty-second signatory to the Convention, would never have addressed the plight of these thousands of working children.

Worldwide attention has been paid to the concern over child labour in the developing world. Alec Fyfe attributes three main reasons for this. Firstly, he cites the serious economic deprivation faced by children which limit their psychological and physical development. Secondly, he notes the growing concern that the employment of children some countries can gain a comparative advantage in international trade. Lastly, he observes that a stronger commitment of public opinion than in the past to the cause of human rights is required to the rights of children in particular, following the adoption of the UNCRC.¹

4.1 The 'Best Interests' Principle

For UNICEF, the most important principle in a rights approach is the concept

¹See Fyfe, 1996
of "the whole." The Convention on the Rights of the Child consists of 54 articles relating to five clusters of rights: survival, development, protection, participation, and mobilization. Applying a rights approach involves understanding and formulating interventions that reflect all five clusters; no one set of clusters takes precedence over another set. This concept of holism and holistic programming "reflects the changing and enhanced mandate of UNICEF under the CRC and represents a fundamental shift from quantitative development to more qualitative development."

The strength of the UNCRC as the blueprint for child development projects is based largely on the perception that child rights are inseparably linked to one another. The right not to be economically exploited, for example, is linked in practice to the right to a basic education, and should therefore be administered together under a comprehensive framework. Thus, assigning the importance of education to local community initiatives such as the Dhaka MOU implies corresponding changes in the role of government.

The UNCRC is consistent with principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as it has developed and is built upon the same principles of safety, security and development of the human person. The UNCRC has as its feature Article a clause which refers to the "best interests of the child." More specifically, Article 3(1) states:

"In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or
private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration."

As of mid-September 1996, the Convention had been ratified by all countries except the Cook Islands, Oman, Somalia, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and the United States, making it the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history. Because of its near universal ratification, the UNCRC is placed at the forefront of the debate about whether human rights norms are capable of attaining ‘universality’ or are inevitably relative to each individual society. Opponents of the UNCRC criticize it as being Eurocentric and anti-family and are opposed to the UNCRC’s emphasis on child autonomy. Although the best interests principle has often been recognized in international instruments, it has yet to acquire such specific content or to be the subject of any sustained analysis designed to shed light on its precise meaning.

The “best interests” principle in the UNCRC is an interpretive concept used as a tool for exposing values and ideologies that may conflict with the basic rights guaranteed to children by the Convention. The “best interests” principle has come to be known in one form or another to many national legal systems and has important analogues in diverse cultural, religious and other traditions, but many diverse interpretations are given to the principle in different settings. In highly industrialized countries, the child’s best interests are best served by policies that emphasize autonomy and individuality to the greatest extent, whereas in more

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5 Alston, 1994, p. 4
traditional societies, links to family and local community might be considered to be of paramount importance and the principle ‘best interests’ be interpreted as requiring subordination of individual child’s preferences to the interests of the family or extended family. Interestingly, the “best interests” concept, as an ideal standard for all actions concerning children, arose originally in a situation of simple choice within the context of judicial decision-making in cases of custody.\(^*\)

The reference in Article 3(1) to “the best interests of the child principle” is one that requires the re-examination of fundamental conceptions about children. At its simplest, Article 3 forces children’s rights advocates to understand the heterogeneity in the lives and experiences of children around the world. It is a reminder that one cannot use the same standards of judgment for each and every country; moreover, “there is no guarantee that an approach that has worked in one country will have the same impact in other countries with different socio-economic conditions and different cultural norms and practices.” \(^\dagger\) The underlying philosophy of this approach, according to UNICEF, is the notion of choice, for as we have seen, legislation that prohibits the employment of children or makes primary education compulsory restricts the options of children without properly taking into account the consequent impact of such actions.

The Convention does not propose any set formula for accommodating competing interests, but rather presents a range of different balancing principles, the reconciliation of which in any given situation will depend on a variety of

\(^*\) Azer, 1994, p. 235
\(^\dagger\) Bissell and Sobhan, 1996, p. 32
considerations, including respect for the motivations of the various parties. One interpretation is to view the 'best interests' principle as a lens through which the significance of certain aspects of the Convention in different societies can be described. It is how interests are determined that remains the principal dilemma in the application of the principle.

Philip Alston informs us of the damaging aspects of an inadequately analyzed application of human rights based policies with respect to the UNCRC. He also addresses the UNCRC and its interpretation of children’s rights, and serves to situate my research in a particular intellectual context. Alston suggests that there are three roles for the “best interests” principle; (i) as an aid to construction, (ii) as a mediating principle, assisting in resolving conflicts between different rights within an overall framework of the Convention, and (iii) as a basis for evaluating laws and practices of States’ parties.

Crucial to this discussion of human rights is whether Rhoda Howard’s interpretation is correct that “in most known human societies, dignity and justice are based on the inalienable privileges of unequal beings, embodying humanness according to socially defined status categories entitled to different degrees of respect.” Howard argues that human rights are not seen in most cultures as important to be applied equally to every human being. She argues that the concept of human rights is not universal in origin and cannot even be located in most societies. If

Howard’s observations are correct then the application of the UNCRC to

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8 See Alston, 1994
9 Alston, 1994, p. 16
10 Howard, 1995, p. 91
Bangladeshi society presents significant difficulties. Would this argument dismiss the UNCRC and its embodiment in the MOU schools project as an impossible accomplishment?

Once deconstructed and analyzed, the UNCRC promotes an ideal notion of childhood which may indeed reflect a certain element of Eurocentrism. If this is so, the Bengali notions of childhood which involve the reaching of a certain level of "understanding" within one's carefully defined and constructed section of society or *samaj* neither connect nor relate to the UNCRC's conception of childhood. If the UNCRC has used a Eurocentric, liberal notion of human rights and notions of humanity reflective of a European tradition of history, moral philosophy and even language, then it is particularly difficult to represent all cultures and ratifiers of the UNCRC with this underlying notion of childhood. John Eekelaar addresses these concerns by stating that "conceptions of children's best interests are strongly rooted in the self-images of world cultures and these objectivizations of children's interests will inevitably largely constitute the way the 'principle' is viewed in those cultures."\[^{11}\]

Blanchet is very specific when discussing the notion of personhood and linking it with an interpretation of rights. She argues that rights "cannot be ascribed a universal meaning and value because such concepts are rooted in historically specific cultures and societies, and can only be understood and enacted in those contexts."\[^{12}\]

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\[^{11}\text{Eekelaar, 1994, p. 57}\]
\[^{12}\text{Blanchet, 1996, p. 22}\]
area such as child labour, the tenets of this UN document require careful interpretation.

4.2 Prominence of Parental Rights

The UNCRC connotes a process of understanding child rights whereby primary importance is given to the child’s welfare. This viewpoint has been criticized within the Bangladeshi samaj as too child-rights oriented and as undermining the need to consider the interests of parents and other children in the family. Goonesekere argues that “the emphasis on an open-ended concept of ‘child welfare’ can undermine commitments to realize the ideal standards on child rights articulated in the United Nations Convention, unless the concept itself is interpreted within the framework of those rights and international standards.”

It is relevant to understand the child-centered concerns in Bangladesh and other South Asian nations, particularly in a context where the “best interests” concept in the Convention can be interpreted as a tool for exposing values and ideologies that may conflict with the basic rights guaranteed to children by the Convention.

Goonesekere also indicates that it is necessary “to recognize that the colonial experience of Bangladesh contributed to secularism and uniformity in important areas of child law and policy.” According to Goonesekere’s studies of the best interests of the child from a South Asian perspective, recent judicial initiatives and

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13 Goonesekere, 1994, p. 118
14 ibid, p. 119
activism such as the MOU have the potential for creating a new environment of access to justice and community participation in the realization of children’s rights. These developments have in general, been beneficial to disadvantaged sections of the child population and can be used creatively to ensure that all children benefit from uniformly applicable policy approaches. In addition to social activism, the National Constitution of Bangladesh represents a powerful value framework that could be used to link with ratified international standards on child rights such as the UNCRC. Goonesekere suggests that “rather than using the ‘best interests’ as a relative concept for interpreting child rights, these rights can be used to provide the framework for laws and policies on children.”

While there appears to be awareness of the child’s right to provision and protection, Goonesekere fears that South Asian countries will find it difficult to develop participatory rights. Goonesekere’s reflections are similar to those of Participant “E” in suggesting that unless children are afforded participation rights, the perception that children will suddenly move from childhood to majority will continue to pervade parenting in the family, and policy planning.

Goonesekere suggests that the rights perceptions of the UNCRC can be used to revive those traditional values which will conform with the framework once it is accepted as an international standard for all countries in South Asia. Moreover, it is important for the children of South Asia, and Bangladesh in particular, that parents not obscure the realities of ignorance and social and economic deprivation, and

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13 Goonesekere, 1994, p. 145
reconstruct questionable 'indigenous' values, so as to undermine basic standards already accepted and developed further by the UNCRC. Children's best interests will not be promoted "unless the national constitutions which link to international standards are used to address the inherent inadequacies in both the colonial and indigenous laws."\textsuperscript{16}

Eekelaar is particularly critical of the "best interests" principle, stating that it "is inconsistent with the proper allocation of responsibility of the child between the family and the state."\textsuperscript{17} His objection is based on Mnookin's critique (1975), that the allocation of an indeterminate principle of children's rights would make "parents too vulnerable to unpredictable and largely unchallengeable impingements on their upbringing of their children."\textsuperscript{18} Mnookin's seminal critique refers to the incompatibility between the indeterminacy of the 'principle' as a decision standard and the role of the law in restraining official behaviour and predicting decision outcomes. Eekelaar's suggestion is to move towards dynamic self-determinism which would appeal to each individual child within each culture and demand that such a child, as he or she develops, "be allowed space within the culture to find its own mode of fulfillment... which may imply adjustments to that culture."\textsuperscript{19}

4.3 Cultural Relativism versus Universalism of the UNCRC

\textsuperscript{16} Goonsekere, 1994, p. 146
\textsuperscript{17} Eekelaar, 1994, p. 45
\textsuperscript{18} ibid
\textsuperscript{19} ibid, p. 57
The well-known anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, refers to the concept of culture as "soft facts of existence... what people imagine human life to be all about, how they think one ought to live, what grounds belief, legitimizes punishment, sustains hope, or accounts for loss." Geertz appears less interested in the cultural contrasts between cultures or within cultures as he is in their anthropologically generated conjunction. As Geertz states in *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist*;

"culture gets polyphonic, even disharmonic, themes invoking counter-themes which reinvoke themes, instructively offset from the originals" [and]" ...that to describe a form of life... has some difficult implications, of which perhaps the most difficult is that the light, such as it is, and the adjustment as well, comes from the description, not from what the description describes". (underline author's)

Bearing Geertz's construction of cultural complexity in mind, the contrast of cultural views regarding childhood has huge implications in the application of the UNCRC in Bangladeshi society.

The Post World War II human rights regime is invariably characterized by a determined, often single-minded, commitment to universality on the part of the treaty drafters. But in recent years, a certain cultural relativist debate has developed, whereby the moral acceptability of laws has had to be evaluated according to the social, cultural, and political context in which they were to be implemented. The classical relativist position means that the moral acceptability of laws must be

\textsuperscript{20} Geertz, 1995, p. 43
\textsuperscript{21} ibid, p. 48
\textsuperscript{22} ibid, p. 62
evaluated according to the social, cultural, and political context in which they were found. The very aspiration to achieve acceptance of certain universal standards invites continuing controversy and provokes the assertion of relativistic positions, but Alston suggests that upon closer examination, this aspiration provides insights to help respond to some of the criticisms made of the universalist aspirations of human rights law.\(^{23}\)

Cultural relativity regarding a human rights culture impacts directly upon our ability to understand why child labour persists in the first place and how Bangladeshi social groups view children and their rights. The treatment in many cultures of children as "nonpersons," or merely what Howard terms "persons-in-formation" is common.\(^{24}\) It is therefore noteworthy that the very recent evolution of the idea that children ought to have specifically defined rights deserves special attention. In the Bangladeshi case, the BGMEA has, not surprisingly, taken the view that employees have no particular rights particularly the right to form a labour union. The Primary and Mass Education Division at the Bangladeshi Ministry of Education does not view all children as equal and entitled to a quality education by the simple fact that it has until very recently not even considered non-formal education as a valid form of education. Nor until recently had it supported any programs for marginalized working children.

Fernando Téson reacts to the universality versus relativism debate by suggesting that cultural relativism is ultimately self-defeating. The language of the

\(^{23}\) Alston, 1994, p. 16

\(^{24}\) Howard, 1995, p. 94
UNCRC, although heralded as being the most widely ratified human rights document in the history of humankind, gives rise to differences of opinion on many scores. Téson would argue that it is difficult to state that the UNCRC has been universally ratified because the treaty law allows signatories to ratify with specific reservations. This means that no document can have complete universal acceptance. Individual states can, in other words, choose which parts of the UNCRC are applicable to their situations and disregard others, while still claiming to honour the intention or the spirit of the convention to protect the rights of the child.

Abdullahi An-Na‘im is concerned that normative universality in human rights should neither be taken for granted, nor abandoned in the face of claims of contextual specificity or cultural relativity. An-Na‘im argues that human rights scholars and activists throughout the world must recognize that a universal project for the rights of the child cannot be legitimately achieved through the ‘universalization’ of the norms and institutions of dominant cultures, whether at a local, regional, or international level. An-Na‘im’s proposal is that it is essential in the establishment of appropriate procedures and processes to ensure that not only dynamic diversity of perspectives are appropriate in taking initial action regarding children, but also “opportunities for subsequent contestation, revision, and change of such action.”25

There are however, many cases in which cultural arguments alone continue to be used today to justify the denial of children’s rights, i.e., justification of female

25 An-Na‘im, 1994, p. 80
circumcision, and the non-education of lower caste, lower class children, especially girls. We cannot deny the interplay of these different, yet co-existing dimensions of human rights. What these specific examples reveal is that no amount of universalist aspirations can cancel out the inevitable influence of cultural values and perceptions.

Certainly, even after ratification, the exploitation of children continues. The problem now is to move away from the potential denial of rights and even the embracing of what Alston calls an "artificial and sterile universalism or the acceptance of an ultimately self-defeating cultural relativism." There is a sense among the NGO community in Bangladesh that once the Government of Bangladesh and the BGMEA ratified the MOU both parties felt that they were "off the hook" and that they had no need to pursue more examples of the UNCRC in action because they had appeared to endorse it. But this self-congratulatory attitude is premature, given the degree of international attention which the issue has attracted.

According to An-Na'īm, the promotion of respect of international human rights standards is often likely to remain superficial and ineffectual until such time as they relate directly to and are promoted through local cultural, religious and traditional communities. But one must understand that indeterminacy is a characteristic feature of human rights norms and that this indeterminacy allows for questioning about what set of values should be used to determine a child's best

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26 Alston, 1994, p. 2
Stephen Parker's concerns regarding the best interests standards as indeterminate involves the fact that the best interests approach depends upon the value system of the decision-maker. An alarming situation emerges, he argues, when "at the same time as the best interests principle is deepening its hold on domestic and international instruments, it also provides a convenient cloak for bias, paternalism, and capricious decision-making."\(^{27}\)

Thus, paradoxes of human rights law according to Alston arise when, on the one hand, norms must be clear, comprehensive, and inflexible to provide the international community with some basis to constrain a government which undermines minimum standards and where on the other hand, any enterprise, or relationship between the state, family, and the child needs to be characterized by a measure of flexibility and adaptability. Parker argues that Article 3(1) has become a hollow concept whereby no yardstick exists by which a States Party's law can be criticized. Parker also cautions against the assumption that there is one best interests standard, as he believes conventions are constructed by communities of rule users which can "reduce uncertainties of application to a considerable extent."\(^{28}\) Parker does not want to produce an analytical model which vindicates cultural relativism. On the contrary, if the international human rights movement is searching for positions from which it can criticize cultural relativism, it will be helped by a clearer sense of different conventions which can supply meaning to the

\(^{27}\) Parker, 1994, p. 26

\(^{28}\) Parker, 1994, p. 27
best interests standard and that by continuing to work away "at the causes and cures of indeterminacy, we will have a clearer sight of what is at stake." 29

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, particular emphasis was placed on the UNCRC, its relevance to Bangladesh and its normative influence in regard to the child labour issues, specifically to the "best interests" clause. I have reviewed the philosophical contexts of cultural relativism versus universalism in the UNCRC and favoured the view of Abdullahi An-Na’im that normative universality in such matters can neither be taken for granted, nor abandoned and that only a dynamic approach towards a diversity of perspectives is appropriate in bringing real benefits to working children. Achievements in the actual elimination of child labour require the use of the Convention from a diversity of perspectives including contestation, as well as interpretation and revision. The MOU affects the rights of marginalized children by “operationalizing” the moral ideal of providing all children a right to an education.

29 ibid, p. 40
CHAPTER FIVE

The Memorandum of Understanding

"This case warns against simplistic a priori assumptions about children in the workplace and against taking action without anticipating its effects on children involved."

Boyden and Myers,

Innocenti Occasional Papers, 1995, p. 38

This chapter focuses on the Memorandum of Understanding signed July 4th, 1995 by the ILO, UNICEF, and the BGMEA to implement a school and stipend disbursement program for child workers in the garment industry. The document is attached as Appendix B. The negotiation process itself is outlined, as is the agreement itself. The MOU is viewed as the practical outcome of the spirit of the UNCRC. The rights of the child and their "best" interests are interpret in the MOU as accepting their employment until such time as a suitable basic education program has been established. The MOU is distinctive among economic agreements in that it is set within the framework of a child's rights perspective. This is in fact the first time such an MOU has recognized the importance of safeguarding the interests and welfare of children. Rather than prohibiting these working children from access to an income, this program offers a stipend to encourage children to attend school. Of particular importance in the MOU is the seminal role played by the BGMEA. The question remains whether the private sector can sustain interest and financial
commitments to this agreement.

Bangladesh is a good example of a convergence of domestic and international interest in child labour. The government of Bangladesh and the non-governmental community have been facing the challenge of poverty alleviation since independence in 1971, yet despite the launch of universal and compulsory primary education campaigns, children continue to work. The garment sector in particular is one in which the United States and many European countries want to see marked by the removal of children from the work force.

UNICEF-Bangladesh's initial involvement in the child labour issue did not relate specifically to the garment industry. Historically, UNICEF in Bangladesh has been involved in successes such as the reduction of infant mortality rates through the promotion of oral rehydration therapy and expanded programs of immunization on which favourable opinions were unanimous in support of UNICEF leadership. But it has had little experience of involvement with business figures and industrialists on issues characterized by a lack of consensus on the best means to proceed. Gradually however, it became clear that any solution would involve respect for the rights of children to be economically active, while at the same time guaranteeing them access to education and basic health-care facilities, as well as preserving the viability of the industry, what UNICEF staff members tout as the "win, win, win" solution.
5.1 The Harkin Bill and its consequences

In 1992 a bill introduced in the United States Senate by Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa became the first major catalyst for change in the child labour situation. Even though the Bill has yet to find its way onto the statute books, the bill posed a real threat at the time to the entire Bangladesh garment industry because it called for the prohibition of the importation to the USA of goods produced in part or in whole using child labour. Threatened by the possibility of the Harkin Bill becoming in 1992, many garment producers summarily dismissed children from work. Rather than seeking access to school, these children looked for new income sources, frequently, in occupations more hazardous and exploitative than garment production, such as rag picking, brick breaking, and in some instances, child prostitution.

The local NGO community began questioning the rationale behind the garment industry’s outright dismissal of children especially those aged 12 and above, arguing that in most cases, the children were performing tasks that could be characterized as ‘light’ work under the terms of the ILO Convention 138. They argued that the real problems were i) conditions of employment, ii) hours worked and, iii) the fact that with few exceptions, the children were not attending school. The industry, on the other hand, was paying more attention to the Harkin Bill which did not make any distinction between work and labour.

While clearly locating itself within the framework of ILO Convention 138,
the Harkin Bill nonetheless went considerably beyond it in both scope and reach and allowed very few options for light work. The original publicity surrounding the employment of children in garment factories focused on the presence of children in factories and neither addressed nor explained the nature of the work being performed. The real problem in terms of the legal dimension was and will continue to be the irregular and uneven enforcement of the local laws that currently exist.

Prior to events surrounding the Harkin Bill, UNICEF Bangladesh had been working with the Ministries of Labour and Social Welfare to devise development projects and programs aimed at reducing the immediate vulnerability of child workers, focusing on street children in particular. The problem of child labour in the formal sector, while of concern within the context of UNICEF’s broader policy goals, was not seen as a priority area for action. As a result, when the crisis in the garment industry first came to a head, the response from UNICEF was essentially reactive, as indeed were those of most other NGOs and concerned institutions.

Despite its negative effects, the positive ramifications of the Harkin Bill have included a great enrichment of the international dialogue about child labour and as a result, new educational programs have emerged. In addition, the private sector has taken a keen interest in the issue, and has become a key partner in this social development effort. The Bill had one ostensibly laudable aim of prohibiting the import of products made by children under 15, but it is an example of how sanctions used as blunt trade instruments have long-term, unforeseen consequences, with the result that they harm, instead of help children. As Bill Myers states in the Innocenti
Occasional Papers (1995); “this case warns against simplistic a priori assumptions about children in the workplace and against taking action without anticipating its effects on children involved.”

5.2 The MOU Negotiation Process

The formulation of the Memorandum of Understanding developed after two years of discussion and negotiation. Following the introduction of the Harkin Bill, the Bangladeshi garment industry came under intense public scrutiny, both locally and internationally. Articles began to appear in the local press as early as April 1993 reporting that factory owners, eager to counter negative publicity and threats to their lucrative export markets had responded by dismissing their child workers. This suggested that the Bill was having the precise effect as had been intended. However, a series of field visits conducted by UNICEF and local NGOs revealed that these retrenched children (those who had been dismissed from employment) invariably sought alternative sources of employment as soon as they were dismissed. These field visits and other anecdotal sources of evidence revealed that these children were not attending school, as the Bill suggested, but rather were opting for unregulated and poorly paid work in the informal sector.

In May and June 1993, UNICEF took the initiative to invite local and international NGOs, industry representatives, officials from the GOB Department of

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1 Myers, 1995, p. 6
Labour and Manpower and representatives from the ILO and the US Embassy to an informal meeting to attempt to formulate a plan of action that would safeguard the best interests of these children. UNICEF convened these initial meetings, but the intention was to facilitate a national plan of action that would be long-term and sustainable, as well as locally “owned,” i.e. fully supported and implemented by Bangladeshi companies and institutions. The participants agreed to set up the National Child Labour Working Group (CLWG) under the leadership of the Government of Bangladesh’s Department of Labour to evolve a measured response for the phased abolition of child labour.

These initial discussions resulted in the evolution of two very different scenarios. On the one hand, garment industry representatives from the BGMEA and the GOB, mindful of the presence of international organizations and concerned about the risk of adverse publicity at a time when Bangladesh was trying to attract much needed foreign investment, argued that the child labour problem in the garment industry was insignificant. Furthermore, in their opinion the situation was irrelevant since the children had been removed from all the factories. On the other hand, Embassy officials and representatives from the NGO community argued that child labour in the industry was in fact widespread and a highly sensitive problem. They cited the Harkin Bill as evidence of a changing consumer

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1 These meetings revealed a wide diversity of interests characterizing the attitudes and concerns of the major participants. The absence of a common ground amongst the various parties was obvious. This will be further elaborated upon in the following chapter.

2 See Bissell and Sobhan, 1996, p. 5

It is important to note that without the MOU negotiations, several Bangladesh companies had already acted on their own. Among them, two garment factories, Oppex and Intersport Ltd. - opened schools on factory grounds for under-age workers and offered stipends to compensate families for the loss of children’s wages.
climate that would no longer tolerate the employment of children.

The BGMEA was unwilling to agree to a unilateral suspension of its dismissal of child labourers. The industry feared that by agreeing to suspend this policy it would be subject to further criticism and the possibility of punitive sanctions under the proposed Harkin Bill. BGMEA representatives argued that the American legislation had rendered them incapable of making decisions for themselves and that the only solution available to them was the immediate removal of all children from the factories as soon as possible.

Compacting this argument was the fact that the policy suspension strategy only addressed the symptoms of a much larger problem. By removing one cohort of all working children from the formal garment sector meant that the employment of all other children was to be viewed as a discrete event rather than as part of a larger, serious problem. Thus, the need to work with employers to change attitudes and behaviour was viewed as a critical part of this gradual approach to the abolition of all forms of child labour. An-Na‘im’s point can be restated here; it is that engaging and challenging - rather than blaming employers - can open up numerous options for innovative programs such as apprenticeships, and domestic resource mobilization.

Eventually, the need to temporarily suspend the policy of dismissing children was endorsed by a range of organizations under the auspices of a national working group, which gave the BGMEA the protection of collective responsibility for the decision. During these preliminary meetings, UNICEF personnel stressed
that the emphasis and aim of the talks was not to attack and censure the industry, but rather to reach an agreement which, while satisfying the interests of all participants, both foreign and local, would ultimately benefit the affected children. With the unexpected cooperation of the BGMEA executive, two immediate steps were put in motion. Firstly, factory owners agreed to suspend their policy of dismissing children and allow UNICEF and local NGOs time to construct an educational program for their rehabilitation. Secondly, the BGMEA executive agreed to allow the ILO and other authorized NGOs to perform the task of calculating the number and distribution of children employed in the licensed garment factories.

To follow from these discussions was the need to proceed with the arrangement of an alternative program for child garment workers. It was thus essential to obtain a clear picture of the number of children working in this industry. However, none of the participants, including those from the BGMEA, seemed to have an idea of the percentage of garment factory employees below the age of 14. Estimates ranged from a few thousand children at the conservative end of the scale to upwards of 100-200,000. A study by Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) on the employment of women in the sector suggested that around 10% of the workforce was under-age. Using that yard-stick, it was estimated that upwards of 80,000 children were employed in some capacity in 1993. It is interesting to note that Bissell and Sobhan (1996) state that industry

\[\text{Bissell and Sobhan, 1996, p. 7}\]

\[\text{Bissell and Sobhan, 1996, p. 7}\]
representatives themselves had no real idea of the numbers of children working in the factories at all, which suggests that contrary to popular belief, there has probably never been any systematic attempt by the industry to recruit children.

Two distinct yet related issues remained to be addressed in the following discussions. Of major concern was the practical problem of how to absorb the younger children into schools run by well-established NGOs, given the lack of capacity within the sector to accommodate the 40,000 new pupils released from the factories. Even if funding had been available, the inability to effectively manage the great numbers of child labourers was dauntingly obvious. Secondly, the handling of delicate negotiations and reconciling the different positions of industry, local, and international NGOs, the US Embassy and the GOB would require innovative diplomatic skills to address the mounting complexities. The involvement of the United States Embassy and the BGMEA were two important departures from traditional ways of resolving such difficulties, thus illustrating that many development problems (particularly when related to trade issues) are inextricably linked.

By May 1994, a real indication of the competing agendas on how best to resolve the child labour problem came in the form of the BGMEA declaring its intention to retrench, dismissing all remaining child workers by October 1 1994. The BGMEA cited the pressure of the US Embassy as the prime reason for this decision. The BGMEA had been particularly hopeful that the Embassy be a signatory to the MOU "in the erroneous belief that such a measure would ensure that garments
manufactured in Bangladesh would be assured continued access to US markets."

This decision by the BGMEA was followed on October 30th, 1994 by a written humanitarian appeal made by child workers organized by the Child Rights Forum, asking the US Ambassador in Bangladesh David Merrill, the ILO Director Paul Bailey, the Country Representative of UNICEF Rolf Carriere, and Senator Harkin to reconsider their dismissals and to formulate an alternative provision for them to continue work including a basic education program."

These unresolved discussions with industry highlighted an important characteristic regarding the issue of developing a project to help eliminate child labour, namely the narrowness of its focus. The Memorandum of Understanding which originated with a great deal of confusion and distrust became increasingly complex with the added voices of the Asian-American Free Labour Institute and the severe threat of the US boycott.

5.3 The Fear Factor: AAFLI, the CLC and the Boycott

America’s trade union federation, AFL-CIO, adopts a comparatively strong position on child labour, and was a major force in support of the proposed US legislation banning the import of products made with child labour. Through its affiliate, the Asian-American Free Labour Institute (AAFLI), it has documented violations in Asia and promoted the application of trade restrictions on countries

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*Bissell and Sobhan, 1996, p. 11
routinely employing child labour*. These two NGOs provided the most significant interventions in the MOU program. Both however, seemed more concerned with attacking the industry for its inaction, rather than focusing on the needs of children.‘

AAFLI maintains a presence in Bangladesh by lobbying local exporters to avoid international sanctions by the early removal of children from their work force and promoting awareness in industry and government of American views on child labour. In other words AAFLI’s work in Bangladesh was at exact odds with what UNICEF is achieving through the Memorandum of Understanding. Interestingly enough, AAFLI’s actions are supported by the US Department of Labour, thus demonstrating that the diverse political interests of US Government, namely expanding trade relations and protecting workers rights, are being played out in the labour politics of such a far-away place as Bangladesh.

AAFLI is funded in large part by the US Department of Labour and by USAID as there are pertinent American trade union interests in the management and trade with the Bangladeshi garment industry. However, within the context of the child labour, AAFLI came to loggerheads with the BGMEA which asked them to leave the MOU negotiation process due to their interest in a strong voice for labour unions. AAFLI then sought to head the monitoring cell of the GOB’s Child Labour Working Group (CLWG), providing them with immediate access to garment factories. However, several local NGOs argued that it was inappropriate for an American organization to assume such a prominent role within a national group. Frustrated

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* See Boyden and Myers, 1995
* Bissell and Sobhan, 1996 p. 13
with the negotiation process, AAFLI decided to open schools of its own, using the GSS teaching methodology with no income substitution program. Bissell and Sobhan draw attention to the irony of AAFLI approaching UNICEF asking for their schools to be included under the MOU program\(^{10}\).

The second US organization to become involved during the final stages of the discussions was the US-based consumer organization named the Child Labour Coalition (CLC). The CLC had been in contact with the BGMEA throughout the course of negotiations to pressure it to address the child labour issue or face the threat of a US boycott. The CLC’s efforts to instigate an outright boycott of all Bangladeshi garments were serious. According to Bissell and Sobhan, the CLC’s call for the boycott was unfortunate as it only served to polarize the debate and thereby validate the BGMEA’s proposed solution to dismiss all child workers.

According to UNICEF, it was clear that the CLC was poorly informed about the prevailing economic conditions in Bangladesh, the reasons why children work, and the steps that need to be taken to address the issue in a way that truly safeguards the child. Without this information it was inappropriate for the CLC, which had no status or presence in the country, to involve itself and attempt to dictate the terms of what at the end of the day was a local problem with local consequences. By attempting to deny Bangladeshi goods access to US markets in the name of eliminating child labour, the CLC, according to UNICEF, demonstrated that it was more interested in pandering to the sensibilities of its membership than addressing

\(^{10}\) See Bissell and Sobhan, 1996
the child labour problem in a systematic and meaningful way.\(^{11}\)

What seems to have been forgotten is that the impact of a boycott would have been felt hardest by the one million women whose livelihood and very existence was threatened by a possible loss of access to US markets. In fact, jeopardizing the jobs of millions of women increased the likelihood of children being sent out to work.\(^{12}\) After these threats, not only were jobs and money gone - but also the close supportive friendships which developed between female co-workers. In addition, the pride and self confidence the women gained from this opportunity to earn and contribute to their families welfare was destroyed overnight. It was even argued by some that the Harkin Bill in certain situations strengthened the hand of conservative factions who believe that a woman's place is in the home.\(^{13}\)

A second set of NGOs comprising some local and European NGOs were also highly critical of the MOU but for quite different reasons. Not having been party to the negotiation process, these NGOs objected to what they felt was a misguided attempt to impose international standards of behaviour in a short-sighted fashion. OXFAM and Save the Children Fund UK both released statements to the press distancing themselves from the project, arguing that work in a factory could, under certain circumstances, be directly beneficial to the development of the child. UNICEF was perceived locally by these NGOs as supporting an approach that denied children the right to be economically active, in contrast to the international

\(^{11}\) Bissell and Sobhan, p.14
\(^{12}\) Bissell and Sobhan, 1996, p.14
\(^{13}\) UNICEF Working Document, 1995
perception that UNICEF Bangladesh was 'pro-child labour'. The main lesson drawn from these experiences was not only the importance of mobilizing opinion among the broader NGO community, but sharing information at an early stage with all interested NGOs. This is most important particularly when one is focusing on changing attitudes and behaviour.

Most ready-made garment companies took no real action on schooling until the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on July, 4th, 1995, by the BGMEA, the ILO and UNICEF. The implementation process had finally begun. The MOU Steering Committee comprised the signatories as well as observers from the Bangladesh Ministry of Labour and Manpower and the American Embassy in Dhaka and still meets to discuss progress, redress difficulties, and explore creative solutions to emerging challenges.

5.4 The Rapid Assessment Survey

As part of the MOU feasibility study, a Rapid Assessment Survey of children working in garment factories in Dhaka, Chittagong, and Khulna was conducted. Teams composed of representatives from UNICEF, the ILO and the BGMEA underwent training in rapid assessment and survey techniques and managed to make no fewer than 1,821 factory visits. The results revealed that 10,547 children were identified for participation in the school program and that they indeed stated a
demand for education. One of the major difficulties resulting from these surveys reflected the fact that the home addresses of the children identified in the factories are difficult to obtain. This makes the work of the implementing agencies - BRAC and GSS - extremely complicated. Additional interviews conducted in 1994 by the American qualitative researcher, Bert Pelto, have confirmed that the dismissed children were not going to school and were opting for unregulated and even more poorly paid work in the informal sector. The message was clear that the Harkin Bill had not achieved its stated goal of eliminating child labour, but in fact worsened conditions of work for adult labourers who could not supervise their children in the garment factories.\textsuperscript{15}

The lack of accurate information on the whereabouts of the displaced children and a growing understanding of the type of work being performed by the children in the garment industry helped in the evolution of the work-study option. Lack of data on the dismissed children was proving to be a barrier to their school enrollment. Factory records do not normally list a home address for employees, and certainly not for any underage workers; hence it was practically impossible to trace most of the displaced children.\textsuperscript{16} Many of the children concerned live in slum communities with no fixed address and other children simply do not know their addresses even if they have one; others move about in unsettled fashion as their parents seek out work in vast urban complexes.

\textsuperscript{15} Interestingly, subsequent versions of the Harkin Bill have indeed recognized the importance of rehabilitation, and included an allocation of $100,000 to the International Program for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), the ILO's special program to eliminate child labour.

\textsuperscript{16} Bissell and Sobhan, 1996, p. 27
5.5 The Main Provisions of the MOU

The main provisions of the MOU specify that children should not be dismissed from garment factories until there is an appropriate education program in place for them, and that once enrolled in an MOU school, each child receives a stipend once a month. It was agreed that no new children under the age of 14 would be hired by BGMEA member factories, and that employment would instead be offered to a qualified family member of the underaged workers. The underlying aim of the MOU is to try and move beyond simplistic interventions that aim at baring children from the work-place to focus on the much more important issue of process, including the recognition that child labour cannot simply be legislated out of existence. An additional factor is the need to form coalitions with non-traditional partners and to devise interventions that reflect the best interests of the child rather than address some abstract concept of morality that may or may not have any relevance to the practical problems facing a country such as Bangladesh.\(^\text{17}\)

In the area of education, the BGMEA, UNICEF and the ILO were to “make every effort” to place as many underaged workers in schools as possible and that these three parties would work with the government to carry out these programs. It was also agreed that the education component of the MOU would be made completely free for working children. In the area of income substitution, the central

\(^{17}\) Bissell and Sobhan, 1996, p. 22
elements highlighted in the MOU include providing monthly stipends of Taka 300, the equivalent of U.S $7.40 to terminated child workers attending 80% of school programs.

A. The MOU Schools

The MOU schools in general are located near where the children are thought to reside - urban slums - and are run by two large indigenous NGOs - the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), and GSS, Gonoshahajjo Sangstha. On average, 20 to 30 children will be enrolled in each school depending on the number of children living in the respective neighbourhoods. One teacher will be assigned to each school. The NGOs will recruit the teachers with preference given to female teachers, who will receive 15 days pre-service training and monthly refresher training. Teaching methods will be child-centered, activity based and participatory. Classes will be conducted for three hours a day 6 days a week, class timings will be for BRAC schools decided jointly with children and parents and fixed for GSS schools. Initially the program is to run for two years.

B. Stipend Disbursements

The stipend aspect of the MOU otherwise known as income substitution was built into the MOU indirectly. Girls make up the majority of under-age workers in
the garment industry, and fears of adverse effects of loss of income such as an increase in child prostitution resulted in calls for some form of an income substitution package to compensate the children and their families for lost income, thereby ensuring that the children were not placed at greater social risk. Replacing the incomes of all the children was a daunting prospect and seemingly impractical. Even using the industry’s own estimates of 10,000 child workers, an income-substitution scheme would have cost several million dollars annually. The proposed Taka 300 monthly stipend was based on an estimate of the average wage of working children. Parties to the MOU agreed that such a stipend would not replace but instead reduce the sudden shock of lost income.\textsuperscript{18} UNICEF’s conditions on the stipends include regular attendance, no marriage, and an agreed-upon academic performance.

The ideal MOU income substitution program would require banks to provide savings facilities for children. It would favour an institution that would waive service charges, provide incentives for children, such as monthly interest and bonuses for academic performance. In addition, the bank could provide credit and loans to families investing in small business ventures, as well as health insurance and other social benefits for children and their families relinquishing their jobs in garment factories. Talks on the creation of a Child Labour Welfare Fund were also held with the idea that buyers would contribute a given percentage of their profits towards this Fund which, in turn, would be used to subsidize educational and other

\textsuperscript{18} Bissell and Sobhan, 1996, p. 20
programs designed to improve the welfare of child workers. Given the international dimension to the problem, such initiatives would be a welcome redefinition of socially responsible business practices.\textsuperscript{19} The most current program strategy to date is the coordination of identification cards for all working children in the industry.

C. Verification and Monitoring

The ILO is providing technical assistance and financial support amounting to some $250,000 for a labour inspection program. In cooperation with the government, the ILO will help to strengthen the factory inspection system in the country. Verification has become a contentious issue, as both the ILO and UNICEF have long-standing interests in the child labour problem, albeit from different mandates and perspectives. In addition, the industry was unwilling to accept foreign agencies engaged in policing their factories.

The ILO is active in designing a verification system that meets the needs of all partners, and it continues to insist that the GOB inspectorate be included in planning, and in the proposed verification scheme.\textsuperscript{20} The ILO's role in the verification and monitoring of BGMEA factories is vital to the success of these school projects, because as the verification system is designed to ensure the movement of children from their jobs to schools, and the confirmation of payment

\textsuperscript{19} Bissell and Sobhan, 1996, p. 21
\textsuperscript{20} ibid, p. 20
for work completed up to that date.

My research has found that the punitive or even verification measures are neither well known nor practiced and that there is a high level of frustration as employers are known to be accountable for various violations of the MOU. The real lesson in verification is a question of sovereignty and responsibility. By their own admission, and for a variety of reasons, GOB officials did not feel they could monitor the garment industry with vigilance. However, ultimately and according to ILO specialists, the onus of verification should rest with industry itself.21

In the end, the US Embassy played an invaluable role in ensuring the BGMEA’s cooperation, mediating disputes between the BGMEA and local NGOs, and conducting important advocacy work on behalf of the project in the USA. The Embassy also provided UNICEF with an unprecedented opportunity to advise it about the Embassy’s own process of devising a policy on child labour which will impact on other countries that do business with the USA.

D. MOU Budget

UNICEF committed itself to contribute $175,000 in 1995 as well as additional support later: the BGMEA agreed to give $50,000 a year (for three years) to the MOU school project. The ILO and its IPEC department have also made a contribution: the ILO will provide technical assistance and financial support of US $ 250,000 for the

21 Bissell and Sobhan, 1996, p. 20
verification program within the context of the International program for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). This will be in addition to the normal allocation for IPEC. In order to successfully implement the MOU satisfactorily, about three million US dollars would be required.

5.6 Contradictions and Inconsistencies

A considerable communication gap exists concerning the implications of the Harkin Bill, the role of the GOB, the reasons for UNICEF and ILO involvement, the sincerity of the industry, and the process of negotiation that has led to the creation of the MOU in its existing form. Outside of the country, it was clear that a significant amount of public relations work was needed to repair the damage to the industry's reputation that resulted from the adverse publicity generated over the course of the previous three years. It became important, therefore, to place the MOU in its proper context. All parties agreed that the MOU should not be viewed as the definitive answer to the problem of child labour in Bangladesh. At best, it should be seen as a test case that could act as a model for future interventions, both in other industrial sectors in Bangladesh, as well as for other garment-exporting nations.

The Harkin Bill itself was known to contain numerous inconsistencies. It attempted to use trade controls to make changes in the Bangladeshi labour force, but completely ignored the broader social and economic context within which children

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22 The Memorandum of Understanding official document, 1995
23 Bailey-Wiebecke, Rahman, 1996, p. 52
are directly affected. It concentrated on prohibition rather than regulation, purposely ignoring the possible consequences for the very children it sought to protect. By narrowly defining child labour as only a minimum-age violation, the Bill completely disregarded the spirit of the ILO Convention 138 that deals with the age of admission to employment. Its interpretation of the problem prompted a simplistic response from employers - the immediate termination of the employment of children under 15 from factories. The Bill contained no provisions for the rehabilitation of these children.  

The Harkin Bill’s action was restricted to the garment industry, where the children were engaged only in ‘light’ jobs. Factories that produce goods for the international market are not typical settings for child labourers. But as noted previously, most working children are to be found in the non-formal sectors of the economy. In urban areas, the largest numbers are in domestic service, vending, rag picking, stone and brick breaking or similar activities. Children in the garment industry or other firms manufacturing for export account for less than 5% of the underage workforce.  

An important element in the MOU negotiations is the role played by foreign investors. Many have thrived on paying low wages and denying workers their basic rights such as receiving payment for their work. The beneficiaries are numerous and include the American consumer. The biggest losers are the garment workers and their families. The Harkin Bill also contradicted its own stated intent by

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24 See UNICEF Document, 1995
25 ibid
attempting to assert one particular right at the expense of all others. By limiting its vision to the right to education, it threatened to violate the children’s fundamental right to survival, leaving them in a more vulnerable position than before.26

Particular concerns amongst UNICEF and BRAC officials in Dhaka and Chittagong in late August 1996 included; children not coming to schools, children unaware that these schools existed for them, claims made by the children that their stipends were insufficient, instances where their employers denied payment of their full wages and their “pay back” would not be given if they left the factories, and the concern that children were moving from factory to factory and changing their names. The lethargy on the part of the owners and managers meant that a lot of children were unaware of these MOU schools.

In addition, early on in my participant observation period, I noticed that one of the central discrepancies in the management of the MOU involved the fact that no agency was directly responsible to get children out of the factories and into the schools. It seemed from my observations in the informal steering committee meetings that nobody wanted the responsibility. The same issue arose when I visited the MOU schools in Chittagong, confirming this as a central problem.

“The ILO views the low numbers of children attending the MOU schools as the fault of the community groups, not those of the factory managers, however, BRAC and GSS view their role as with the community not with the factory owners. The bottom line is that not one agency is responsible for getting the kids into the MOU schools. It becomes, then, a question of ethics, values, attitudes, morality.  

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26 See UNICEF Document 1995, p.15
Factory owners should be responsible, but how does one enforce this. This is not a police state, and the factory owners know the kids are desperate and will work for anything. BRAC and CSS can only do so much as their commitment lies with the urban slum communities not with the factory owners, and if BRAC and CSS become more involved in the MOU project and in the case that it should fail, they may be risking their good reputations and trust which has taken them a long time to build." Suzanne Scott, Fieldnotes Journal Vol. 2, p. 146.

5.7 Recommendations

Programs for “children in especially difficult circumstances” tend to be less finite than programs in other sectors. This is relevant in child labour situations, because the norms of acceptable practice change constantly. If in the specific case of the Bangladeshi MOU, income is effectively substituted for 75% of children, if school facilities are adequate, and if special efforts are undertaken to motivate children and parents to invest in education, the outcome can be satisfactory. This type of holistic modeling provides a means for development practitioners to broaden their understanding of how multiple and complex relationships could impact on a group and on efforts to work with that group. If sensitive enough to the needs of a cohort of children used to working, and who must work, the program could be meaningful and might keep children out of laborious, exploitative forms of employment. Acquiring skills in the classroom could make a difference. Equally important, the learning experiences could be joyful, providing a few hours of respite.  

ibid, p. 30
from a life full of harsh reality at a young age. 

A clear lesson can be learned in all of this. Because of their potential to do harm, in any situation where sanctions are contemplated, a child-impact assessment would need to be made at the point of application, and constant monitoring would be needed thereafter to gauge the long-term effects on children. 

It is still clear that cooperation with the BGMEA membership is directly proportional to their individual understanding of the work that is being done. Winning the trust of the BGMEA was a necessary step in assuring the success of the talks and any future projects because no deal was possible without its cooperation. Obtaining BGMEA support was complicated by the contentious origins of the project which left the industry wary of the motives of outside organizations, and by ongoing fears about losing access to international markets. There were times, however, during the negotiations when the BGMEA was more interested in using the discussions as a means of obtaining favourable publicity than in making a serious attempt to address the problem. 

The senior partner in this project of course has been the GOB. The Department of Labour was the initial focus of UNICEF's work on child labour, but as the project evolved and the threat of boycotts became real, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Commerce also became involved. The fact that the GOB did fully endorse the terms of the MOU has had major long-term consequences for UNICEF's work in the area of child labour and education.

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28 ibid, p. 34
30 Bissell and Sobhan, 1993, p. 6
The participation and endorsement of projects by organizations like UNICEF have had a significant influence on the thinking of the drafters of the Harkin Bill. In its current form, the Bill specifically acknowledges the efforts of countries to address the problem in a constructive manner and even provides provision for US financial support to these efforts. More recently, UNICEF representatives have testified at US Senate sub-committee hearings on child labour, citing the numerous steps taken to address the problem in a constructive manner.\(^3\)

Babar Sobhan recommends in his UNICEF Report 1995 that the GOB's Ministry of Education should examine the possibility of implementing a procedure of certification such that completion of the primary school cycle of an NGO non-formal school should be recognized as being on par with an equivalent number of years of schooling in government school systems. Another recommendation is that employers meet regularly with other representatives of child interests and work out a procedure through which education leads to improved job prospects by creating incentives for education. Sobhan also suggests the registration of children through an identification card campaign and the creation of a credible data base with family profiles. In addition, he proposes an organized vocational/job placement scheme.

An additional suggestion is the possibility of creating compensatory mechanisms for children to work fewer hours, given that one quarter to one third of the children's monthly income comes from working overtime.\(^2\) Finally, the need to invest in improving the overall level of skill and training of garment

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\(^3\) See US department of Labour child labour Hearings.

\(^2\) ibid, p. 25
workers has to be an essential part of the future of development of garment industry.\textsuperscript{33}

More qualitative data is necessary in order to develop a more adequate understanding as to how work impacts on the development of the child. Study parameters should include issues such as; time allocation, sleep, leisure, and school work.\textsuperscript{34} UNICEF may need to focus on different program options for the future.

5.8 Latest Developments of MOU

As of February 28th, 1997, 8,076 child garment workers have been enrolled in a total of 316 schools. Of these schools, 221 are managed by BRAC serving 4,413 children, and 95 schools are run by GSS serving 3,663 children.\textsuperscript{35} According to the latest UNICEF Bangladesh MOU update, about 50% of the originally surveyed children have turned 14 years of age which qualifies them to work in factories. The update also states that 5,042 children have received the stipend resulting in the total amount of Taka 7,563,749.00 (in dollars?). This means that 3,034 children have yet to receive the stipend. The report also indicates a drop-out figure so far amounting to 587 children.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{33} Sobhan, 1990, p. 25
\textsuperscript{34} Bissell and Sobhan, 1996, p. 30
\textsuperscript{35} Fax from UNICEF Bangladesh, Update on MOU schools, received April 03, 1997.
\textsuperscript{36} ibid
Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the MOU negotiation process by highlighting the key economic and political interests involved. The historical background to the MOU focusing on the role played by the Harkin Bill should prove helpful in the analysis chapter which follows. The emphasis has been on the role of the BGMEA in the MOU negotiation process. The success or failure of the MOU schools venture, according to many UNICEF reports, will continue to depend upon the continued support and full cooperation of the BGMEA. The added complications of AAFLI and US Consumer rights groups have proven difficult but extremely interesting. The next chapter provides a summary of the results and conclusions of the thesis research and identifies future areas of study and recommendations for the MOU project.
CHAPTER SIX

Presentation of Interview Findings

"There's absolutely nothing that has happened regarding this MOU which has been dependent on a single individual's input. It has been a most extraordinary process of give and take, of argument and debate, brainstorming, and vision, from so many different angles and from so many people motivated in so many different ways."

Participant UNICEF B

As stated in the introduction, this thesis has two parts: the first component addresses the contextual complexities of child labour in Bangladesh and the second part provides an analysis of the interviews, participant observation, and fieldnotes conducted at the early stages of the MOU schools project. This chapter unveils the diverse opinions of the participants involved in the negotiation process by organizing the data in the following manner. Firstly, a summary of the organizational characteristics, such as UNICEF and BRAC are discussed in relation to the central themes. Secondly, direct quotations are cited from the transcriptions to emphasize the major themes which include: i) diverse cultural values of childhood, ii) discrepancies in the management of the MOU, iii) inter-agency conflict, iv) the political economy of child labour, and v) issues regarding the financial sustainability of MOU. The participants' responses are identified easily by the abbreviations after the transcription quotations. The order of presentation is in line of declining support for the MOU and the negotiation process, i.e., beginning
with the signatories (representatives from UNICEF, ILO, and the BGMEA), I then present responses of the implementers (BRAC and GSS), the peripheral players (the PMED and the US Embassy), and the critics (AAFLI and SCF - UK).

The Signatories

6.1 The UNICEF Staff

In my capacity as an intern at UNICEF Bangladesh for eleven weeks, I was able to interview five UNICEF Education staff members in relation to the MOU schools project. This project is highly visible in the media and the UNICEF country office is well aware of these developments. I interviewed one woman and four men in detail. They represented the middle management concerns of the MOU project. The nationalities represented were varied; two Bangladeshi nationals, one Nepali, a Canadian and one Dutch national.

My pilot interview was chosen from amongst the others because the material from this interview seemed to reflect the views of a standardized UNICEF assessment of the MOU and the situation of child labour in Bangladesh. By further triangulating my data, I found that the other UNICEF interviews did not move too far from the views expressed by this participant. However, the exceptions include the views expressed by the two Bangladeshi UNICEF staff members. In particular Participant D did not favour the stipend disbursement program as an effective program tool.
"The child garment worker school cannot be a sustainable solution for the elimination of child labour in Bangladesh. With the income substitution program Taka 300 a month will involve huge amounts of money and I doubt any donor will be interested in it. I think giving stipends is not a good solution, rather other components should be included, like bringing the families into a credit program. If some of these children make Taka 500 a month, there is no immediate benefit for these children to come to school, and they may get a job in the informal sector." UNICEF D

In general, the UNICEF participants' responses to the benefits of the MOU schools program were similar. Their belief was that the MOU would be a success as an educational program for child garment workers if the BGMEA and the private sector in general stayed committed to their financial contributions. They viewed the MOU as the best option available to educate working children and most participants credited the BGMEA with the role of making the MOU a possibility, even though they may have initially been reluctant to work with the private sector.

"We came to points in the negotiation where we wanted to walk out on the people in the industry, but then we realized we can't, we must work with this group. We need to use the world economic forum and international chamber of commerce and other global apex bodies in which the business world is organized, we need to use these fora to argue our case on ending child labour and to accelerate the whole process of ending it." UNICEF A

"The real success of this MOU is dependent on the BGMEA. If
they choose at any point not to stay in it, if the garment manufacturers individually refuse to give the children this opportunity, or to recognize what is going on, it will fall on its face and nobody is bound by law to be in the MOU. I feel that success is pivotal on the BGMEA's role.” UNICEF B

“The BGMEA's motivation may be purely economic; it's a business interest, and child labour is definitely a concern for them. This contribution from the private sector in a developing country is very encouraging.” UNICEF C

Another common theme was the concern voiced by most UNICEF staff that the ILO was not doing its share of the agreed work load and that it was not helpful in the negotiation process: i.e. promising to follow up on one aspect of the project or taking responsibility for another and then reneging the following day. In short, the UNICEF staff viewed the ILO as not having taken on as much responsibility as it could have done. This theme of inter-agency conflict can be seen by the following quotations from the UNICEF staff.

“The things the ILO wants out of the MOU are, for example, strengthened relationships with the garment sector and formal verification and monitoring systems in garment production in Bangladesh. Their motivation is slightly different, the partners are different, the emphasis is different. For the ILO, this is less about the elimination of child labour than it is about the imposition of rules and regulations on an industry.” UNICEF B

“I feel quite comfortable saying this; we have seen waxing and
waning enthusiasm on the part of the ILO. The ILO usually can
only enter into an agreement with the tripartite arrangement with
the government, the private sector and the unions. UNICEF is
not bound in the same way as that type of partnership.” UNICEF B

“It is my feeling that the partners of the MOU are still not
equally participating in the implementing of the MOU. My
observation is that the ILO are not serious about the MOU in the
same way that we are.” UNICEF D

“The ILO cannot succeed, because their organization is locked
in with government, employers, and employee organizations,
they can’t talk with the Ministry of Education because they are not
their partners. If nothing happens it’s because they were set up to
fail.” UNICEF A

Another inter-agency conflict involved the tension in the relationship
between AAFLI and the BGMEA, and between UNICEF’s long-term goal for
education development and AAFLI’s relatively new educational projects. In
addition, the poor cooperation among factory owners was, according to UNICEF, a
pressing issue for the future success of the MOU.

“The BGMEA has a very strong attitude towards AAFLI, they
feel they are not a cooperative partner, the BGMEA shared on
many occasions that AAFLI does not want to help them, and in
some ways hindered them.” UNICEF C

“I think there is some dubiousness, if that is such a word, to
reality for AAFLI, for what it thinks is possible in such a short period of time. We’ve (UNICEF) been incessantly criticized by AAFLI for getting more children into schools more quickly and I think it’s just a lack of understanding from an organization that doesn’t do education planning and knows nothing about education.” UNICEF B

The major differences reflected in the data with regard to the theme of the diverse value of children is a significant development. Bearing in mind the differences in terms of the employees’ cultural backgrounds and anthropological perspectives, there were nevertheless some interesting expressions of how childhood is viewed and valued in Bangladeshi society. Among the Bangladeshi staff at UNICEF and other international development organizations who have the benefit of external reference points in regard to child labour, their understanding of child labour was ‘bi-cultural’: they have access to alternative ideologies and theories which are coherent and relevant to their work, yet they are still members in the samaj and thus have a dynamic relationship with the issue of child labour as a violation of children’s rights.

In addressing the major theme of attitudinal differences regarding child labour, UNICEF Participant C mentioned that there was a distinct complacency among most Bangladeshis, a reluctance to transform their mind-sets regarding child labour. He also mentioned a lack of awareness among poor families about the need for education and that child labour cannot be isolated from poverty issues. Of particular interest was the view espoused by Participant UNICEF E, that child labour
was not viewed by Bangladeshis as even an issue, even when he mentioned that he himself employs child domestic servants in his home. He viewed this hypocrisy as the cultural norm for middle to upper-class Bangladeshis.

"You’ll find many Bangladeshis here who believe child labour is a necessary evil, part of the culture, part of the society."

UNICEF E

6.2 The ILO Personnel

Through my interviews with ILO personnel I was able to glean a sense of poor communication and poor understanding between the project management staff at UNICEF and the ILO which I had also sensed interviewing the UNICEF staff. The ILO’s mandate is not centered in education and this is recognized by ILO personnel. It has no direct experience in educational planning, however, it is involved in work safety education. The ILO’s role in the MOU schools project is in verification and monitoring. ILO staff have no implementation role: rather, they are the checks and balances department: monitoring factories and schools, and determining which children are valid recipients of the stipend program. The major issue for the ILO is how to continue funding the stipend program, as they were skeptical that the MOU could sustain the financial costs of this project.

"We’re (the ILO) not really in the school business, but IPEC can fund an activity. At Taka 300, that’s $7.50 a month per child, times
10,000 for a year, that's $900,000, let's round that up to one million. In our budget we have 180,000 and the BGMEA is putting in 250,000, so that gives us 430,000 that's a short fall of 470,000, so where does that money come from?" ILO A

The elimination of child labour for the ILO is a goal which involves protection, and safety training in the workplace. The MOU as a project was viewed by the ILO as entirely UNICEF's responsibility.

"UNICEF is looking after the MOU schools, it is entirely their responsibility." ILO A

Participant ILO B was of the view that the Bangladeshi economy would collapse without the garment industry, which would in turn signal the collapse of the GOB.

"Whoever is in government in Bangladesh must realize that if the garment sector is affected in any way, the economy will collapse, and if the economy collapses, then the government will collapse." ILO B

Participant B also confirmed other Participants' expressions of the BGMEA's insecurity in working with AAFLI and its trade union interests.

"About the Harkin Bill, there are a lot of interpretations. One is that it involves trade protectionism, that the US is trying to protect their own industries and their own jobs. I don't know if this is true, but it is one interpretation. The trade unionists in the
US have a very good relationship with American politicians and they were motivated to come up with this kind of bill. The Bill can be passed and their industry is protected. This is why the BGMEA was skeptical of AAFLI’s intention, as they thought AAFLI was part of the whole trade union super body.” ILO B

Participant ILO B also discussed the issue of distrust among the private sector which he clarified by giving an example.

ILO B: “The argument is if they keep the doors open or the windows open, somebody may take something or drop something through the window, so this kind of pilferage will be there, so that’s the reason. I have seen when the workers enter the factory, each child or employee is checked to see whether they are carrying any explosives or anything from the factory.”

Author: “Have there been many instances where the workers have stolen?”

ILO B: “No, but it may happen, so it’s an apprehension, it’s better to prevent at the very beginning, that’s the argument.”

Author: “So, really it’s a distrust of the people working for them?”

ILO B: “It’s a distrust of the people, yes.”

The fact that almost all garment factories are locked while the employees are working reflects this distrust. There are a number of reasons for this; (i) women are safer during their working hours, (ii) no one can enter and steal prototypes of garments, and (iii) the locked doors become a system whereby the workers are checked upon entering and leaving to check for any foreign items.
Participant ILO B mentioned the term "paralysed economy" referring to the phenomenon that if working children are not given any education, they in turn become low-wage earning adults. He used the word "parasite" to describe the current number of unproductive child labourers who in the future will have children, who will consume goods and services without becoming economically productive.

“If we talk about the long-term perspective, if we have seven to eight million child labourers, if they remain child workers what does that mean? When they become adults, we shall in fact have eight million unproductive citizens who will not contribute to the national economy, and they will consume goods and services produced by other people, so in a way they are a kind of parasite and that’s bad for the country’s future. In the next generation, these eight million child workers will produce 48 million child workers or unproductive citizens, and their number will be more than those who have become educated and will produce a downward spiral in the economy.” ILO B

As a child labour activist, Participant ILO B understood the contradiction in his life because he employs child domestic workers in his home, but he added that such behaviour was "beyond his control." He attributed this contradiction in his life to the ambiguity in terms of the type of work and age limits for children and the lack of social consensus on the issue.

“In terms of work, in terms of age there is ambiguity. Now some people are trying to differentiate between child labour and
child work, but no consensus has been reached so far among professionals.” ILO B

Author: “How do you rationalize the practice of hiring child domestic servants in your home, when you are supposed to be working against child labour ?”

ILO B: “Yes, it is an apparent contradiction, but at the same time when you go back to the dynamics, what causes this, this girl I have, her family was so poor, the father couldn’t feed his family and he begged me to take his daughter into our home so that there was one less person to feed. It’s a contradiction, but it is also a humanitarian factor. We accept her as a family member.” ILO B

Author: “Does she go to school ? “

ILO B: “No, she just arrived a month ago. She does the washing of dishes and cleaning clothes and she plays with my two children. So in a way it’s a contradiction, if you take it from a definitional point of view, but perhaps I don’t know how far I am rationalizing my own conscience.”

Participant ILO B along with many other participants viewed the need for the BGMEA’s cooperation in the project as critical for its future success. He viewed the major constraint to the future of the MOU as parents and teachers who need to ensure the quality of the education. Additional constraints included the egos and attitudes of the powerful garment owners, as he mentioned that there are some factories which the ILO is unable to enter.

“Initially I thought as the BGMEA has signed this MOU, maybe all the factory owners who were members of the BGMEA would abide by the clauses in the MOU, but now I see a different picture, that those who are in the executive committee we have no
problem with them, but there are people who maintain a different standard, they have their own values, they have their own goals. They are powerful people and there are factories where we cannot get into so far. I cannot believe it, the government of Bangladesh is supporting the MOU, the ILO, UNICEF and international agencies are giving pressure and we have so far not entered some factories because they are so powerful, it's a matter of attitude. They have said that nobody will enter." ILO B

Participant ILO B was concerned about the cost factor involved in the stipend program. He was also concerned with the power that the international community has by being able to impose a “social clause” on the Bangladeshi garment industry.

“A negative consequence of the MOU is that this kind of model is giving a signal to the international community that it can impose something on some countries like introducing a social clause in the world trade body.” ILO B

6.3 The BGMEA Representative

My perception was that with the exception of the direct Executive Members of the BGMEA, other members have a poor understanding of the MOU no doubt because of a failure of the executive to explain the MOU to the membership. The overall economic incentives in supporting the MOU schools appear clear, yet the long-term management goals of most garment factory owners are underdeveloped and most BGMEA members still view the child labour issue as a real threat to the success of their enterprises. In analyzing the data, it is important to keep in mind
the fact that in contrast to the Bangladeshi staff of international development agencies, Bangladeshi bureaucrats and business people do not have access to a coherent ideology on child labour. These bureaucrats base their approach to child labour on the misunderstood complexities and decisions presented to them. They are most importantly in a delicate position in the samaj and do not want the status quo changed too dramatically if at all.

The BGMEA Participant was convinced of the transparent nature of the MOU yet he consistently and unrealistically failed to address the truth about violations of the MOU, claiming that there had been no such violations.

"There is the question now of whether after the signing of the MOU there was any new fresh recruitment of child labourers on our part, and so far we do not have any specific instances that these factories have employed under-aged children, no such instances until today's date, August 5th, 1996. So far we have had no instances of the violation of the MOU." BGMEA

In fact on my ILO factory monitoring visits it was obvious that blatant violations of the MOU had occurred on a systematic basis, including more children being hired under the age of 14 by factory supervisors.

"The sewing and finishing departments were on one floor. It was very noisy. The electrical wiring for the sewing machines and fluorescent lighting was tied together with pieces of fabric - a sure fire hazard. In this factory the ILO monitors found 9 children
under 14, 6 girls and 3 boys. Two of the six girls had been enlisted on a previous factory visit and were waiting for the MOU schools to be opened in their area. The other children were new recruits. These children work 11 hour days. They looked very tired and skinny. In another factory, we also found 9 children. They looked very afraid. These children were very diminutive and malnourished. There was a very strong smell of plastic and the air was full of dust from the particles of textiles." Author, tape recorded descriptions and impressions of factory visits, July 21st, 1996.

“When we first entered each factory I saw about six under twelve year olds scurrying away like little animals. The production manager smacked them hard on the back of the head as they rushed past him. The conditions were bad - no lighting in the stairwell, dangerous electricity cables dangling low to the ground, and the floor of the overpass which connected the packaging room to the shop floor was just made out of a thin sheet of metal with linoleum over it. I met the foreign buyer who seemed pretty much unconcerned with the actual production conditions.” Author’s Fieldnotes, July 21st, 1996, Vol. 2, p. 257-258.

“The trip to the garment factories was interesting but depressing. If there are about 1,800 licensed garment factories in Dhaka with nine under 14 year olds employed in them, which was the average I counted on our visits, we’re talking 14,400 children.” Author’s Fieldnotes, July 23rd, 1996, Vol. 2, p. 259.

“I couldn’t help but feel that struggle, the ‘swim to survive’ phenomenon. Every moment is a struggle. All the kids we met are scrambling to get and keep their jobs in the garment factories.” Author’s Fieldnotes, July 23rd, 1996, Vol. 2, p. 263.
The BGMEA Participant attributed the negative publicity surrounding the garment industry to the Harkin Bill. He mentioned that the BGMEA was concerned that the Bill would pose a real threat to this export market of which “63% of the foreign exchange is made.” He stated that the fact that the MOU was signed was an indication of the BGMEA’s commitment, but then added that entrepreneurs have no obligation to provide education to their workers.

“Although we are not obligated to undertake any welfare programs, we are implementing some by putting these children in schools. “BGMEA

He encouraged the MOU to be a model for other sectors of the economy, and when I asked what other sectors could be targeted, the following dialogue ensued.

BGMEA: “After we successfully implement our project, we’ll contribute to other sectors to be made child free.”

Author: “What about contributing to some of the invisible sectors like child domestic workers and child prostitutes, would you be interested in doing the same kind of organization for that sector?”

BGMEA: “No these are not allowed in our country’s religion, you see, as a matter of fact, we have strongly bound our Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, they are under strong religious binding, they cannot do something like that and our society never allows things to happen like that, okay.”
His concerns with the MOU included the difficulty in tracking the actual surveyed working children and guaranteeing that these children gain access to the MOU schools. He was annoyed that the United States appeared unmotivated in addressing the existence of child labour in its own back yard when it was evident to him that the United States was primarily concerned with child labour involved in the manufacturing of garments in the export economies of the developing world.

"I think we will have less child labour than even in the USA, in the USA in the Chinese slums, I have personally seen many child labourers even in New York, but the whole world is not concerned about them, they are concerned only about Bangladesh, and Guatemala, India and Pakistan, countries like that, because we do not hold the command over the world. We are just one of the poor countries so when our image is built-up, then definitely we will go to New York and try to arrange an organization there to oversee their child labour." BGMEA

The Implementers

6.4 BRAC Personnel

In general, BRAC felt disheartened with the MOU because it is not viewed as a program aimed at all working children. Participant BRAC B was of the belief that one cannot simply target child workers, but that an educational innovation should consider all children.
"What you need to do is not look at child workers as such, but try and get all children into an educational process, rather than look at who are child workers. We should give them an education, because children must have an education. Child workers seem particularly deprived because their childhood is being robbed by back breaking work for long hours, but I think education should be provided to everybody." BRAC B

"At times BRAC personnel feel sad, sometimes they feel a bit depressed because in certain cases parents and factory owners are not cooperative." UNICEF C

There is a certain amount of cynicism on the part of the BRAC participants that the MOU is only a response to the US government and the GOB’s concern regarding the garment industry.

"I don’t understand why the US show this type of concern only to children in the garment industry. Is it because garments are exported to their country? And why isn’t UNICEF thinking about other children? Why are they only focused on garment child workers?" BRAC A

Participant BRAC A was able to give me the most frank perception of the MOU. He was particularly critical, yet straight-forward about the causes and conditions of child labour. He explained, for example, why it is that I would find children working in virtually every Bangladeshi home, including his. His explanation was based on the fact that it is culturally normative that anyone who
can afford to have someone work for them does so.

“...In every middle class family, even in upper class families, there are one or two child domestic workers. This is the custom in our country; everywhere you go you will find child domestic workers.” BRAC A

Participant A viewed BRAC as an implementer in the MOU process, not a partner. He felt that the BGMEA was pressured into signing the MOU because of its dependence on the export market. Participant A often referred to Marxist ideology stating that a small elite in Bangladesh has control over all resources, and makes all the policy decisions.

BRAC A: “Have you heard of Das Kapital of Karl Marx?”
Author: “Yes.”
BRAC A: “Capital means less wage to the labourers and the rest of the wage is the capital, so the owners are the capitalists.”

He was clear in his remarks that “education for BRAC is not about maintaining formalities” and that “working children are important to BRAC but that the garment industry is not.”

Participant BRAC A’s concern with the MOU program was that Taka 300 was not enough if a single mother runs a household, as is often the case. One of the main difficulties with the MOU program according to Participant A was in organizing the slum families, as they are made up of the “floating unemployed.” He thought that the MOU was neither well planned nor well organized and he
viewed it solely as an opportunity to deal with bilateral economic issues between Bangladesh and the US. Both BRAC Participants were unconvinced of the virtues of the MOU schools project.

“Looking at this particular MOU project with the garment workers, this doesn’t seem to me to be an answer to Bangladesh’s problem in the sense that vast numbers of children are not receiving an education, are not receiving that kind of opportunity to study, now whether 6,000, 8,000, or 10,000 children in Dhaka or Chittagong get the opportunity not only to be educated but also to have a stipend, this is really a drop in the ocean.” BRAC B

“I think this program is not well planned, not well organized, it’s totally to overcome some problems between America and Bangladesh, I think so. I don’t know why only the garment children, why not children in other areas, say the leather factories, that is more hazardous, why not help them? It’s not well organized. The objectives are not clear to me.” BRAC A

“I think the BGMEA has no motivation, they feel pressurized from the importers like America and the Ministry of Labour in Bangladesh, so they signed.” BRAC A

Both BRAC Participants were worried about the future financial security of such a program.

“They don’t have enough funds.” BRAC A
"I still don’t think the BGMEA has brought out the money. UNICEF is hoping that their money will be replenished by the BGMEA, but it’s not. I don’t think the BGMEA will continue with this for a long period.” BRAC B

Participant BRAC B’s comments on the attitudes of Bangladeshis towards child labourers were most informative. He stated that there is a consciousness within Bangladeshi society which does not want to face the issue of child labour frontally.

“There are a lot of things that go on in secret, some of the children are released and then taken back again, all sorts of things happen, so I think the consciousness within our society is not keen enough to really try and face this issue frontally.” BRAC B

He equated this idea of childhood with an eighteenth century European mentality. He predicts that it “takes 20-30 years for attitudes and behaviours which are not socially well understood to be enforced properly.” He stated that myths regarding child labour are only now beginning to be exploded. He questioned the fact that little attention had been aimed at child domestic servants as they were not creating products for the US market, but that because the RMG industry is an export industry, attention has been focused on the concerns of child garment workers.

Participant B’s particular concerns regarding the MOU were what he calls “wastage issues.”

“There is a problem as soon as a child who turns 14 goes back to the factory. A child may have only been educated for 4 months
and then she feels she has to go back to the factory. I personally think that once a child is enrolled even if they have crossed the threshold of being 14, we should try and ensure that that child gets at least two years of an education, otherwise it’s a waste of time and that child could lapse back into illiteracy very quickly.” BRAC B

Participant BRAC B also stressed the importance that the MOU provide an education which builds self-worth and self-confidence for all children.

6.5 Gonoshahajjo Sangstha (GSS) Participant

GSS and BRAC share the implementing work in the MOU. The conflict which was evident between the interests of GSS versus the BGMEA, is attributed by GSS staff to a misunderstanding regarding an article written in an unfavourable tone about the BGMEA in a GSS publication.

“There was initially a little misunderstanding and of course as you know, we have resolved that. I think the misunderstanding was that they heard something adverse on garment factories and especially the garment owners which was not true and when we sat together we arranged to discuss the problem. We have a magazine that has depicted the factory owners as rough with the labourers and not helpful in providing them with enough salaries and other facilities. We have the freedom of speech and freedom of press and the right to inform people that this is happening, but at the same time there are owners who are doing very well, helping with all sorts of medical facilities and education for their children.” GSS
The GSS Participant’s main concern with the MOU was that GSS spends too much time searching for the children who are eligible to enroll in the MOU schools, as GSS was initially under the impression that the children would be handed over to them, rather than having to search for them.

"It is very frustrating, because according to the MOU the children were supposed to be handed over to us and we really did not think that we would have to go hunting and looking for them." GSS

One aspect which was very interesting and revealing was the Participant’s discussion of how important it is for GSS to make their program affordable so that donors will continue to sponsor them. She was very honest about the competition factor involved in the development business.

"We have to compete with others and we try to do it at a price that is the minimum we can go. We are in a market sort of, so we have to compete." GSS

The major barriers to the MOU schools, according to the GSS Participant, was the lack of funds because she stated that providing education is not cheap and there are many other competitors in the market who can deliver a cheaper product. Another factor was that illiterate parents are unaware of such programs and often view literacy as a luxury.
"All the parents I have met who are illiterate and poor, for them literacy is a luxury, to send their children to the schools is a luxury, especially when these children are earning, but I have found that most of the illiterate parents become quite aware about literacy, and they say 'because we didn't know how to read and write we are poor and we cannot manage our life better', and they tell us that their children should go to school so that they can lead a better life." GSS

The Peripheral Players

6.6 The Ministry of Education, Primary and Mass Education Division (PMED) Staff.

Participant A from the PMED was quoted as saying that there is no future for labouring children as "they are too old to attend the regular government primary schools." In response to the MOU schools project, he claimed to have no interest and no responsibility for MOU schools or for child labourers. He argued that BRAC's NFPE programs were not real programs because there are neither formal grading systems, nor formal examinations, whereas the government formal system has standards. Participant A from the PMED stated that the "GOB Ministry of Education cannot change nor be flexible in order to incorporate working children, for if these children want to attend free primary schools they can." He continued and said that "they are poor people and education is not always the factor for everyone. If they have strong hands, then they should go into garments." He employed a child domestic servant in his home and stated in a revealing comment
that it would be impossible for her to get an education, as part of her job was to take his own children to school.

My encounter with Participant B from the PMED took place at the BRAC sponsored conference entitled "Universal Primary Education in Bangladesh" in Dhaka, in August, 1996. He delivered a report on the numbers of children the GOB has reached with its formal primary system. His paper was severely criticized by other speakers as containing inventions and misrepresentations. Participant PMED B produced, among other questionable data, erroneous figures regarding the percentage of children enrolled in primary education.

In general, the Ministry of Education has a poor understanding of its role to extend primary education. There is little interest in or praise of NGOs who have developed quality yet affordable basic education for children in especially difficult circumstances. In some cases, one senses jealousy that NGOs have done so well and that foreign assistance is channeled through NGOs, rather than through government ministries or agencies.

6.7 The Official from the Embassy of the United States of America

The US Embassy was extensively involved in the complicated playing out of political issues such as the negative consequences of the Harkin Bill and the conflictual role frequently adopted by AAFLI. The US Embassy was generally
viewed by the participants as playing a supportive, supervisory role throughout the MOU negotiations.

"The US Embassy is definitely playing a good role, when we had a deadlock, and couldn’t proceed, the Ambassador played a very important role, a key role in resolving dilemmas." ILO B

The participant from the US Embassy was a Foreign Affairs officer whose portfolio included the garment industry and child labour. He was a visible force in the MOU negotiation process. Child labour was viewed by the US Embassy Participant as a "problem to tackle in the context of promoting economic development." According to the US Embassy participant, there was a need to provide employment for adults. It was also his view that the success of the MOU depended on the garment industry’s willingness to abide by the terms of the MOU.

"The success of the MOU hinges on the garment industry’s willingness to abide by the terms of the MOU. The factory owners have to be very serious about not hiring new children, and they have to be serious about sending the children that they have in the factories to the schools. My question is how successful will the industry itself be in convincing some of its members that we really have to be serious about the MOU. I’m hopeful, but I don’t know if the industry is ever going to be 100% child labour free, but if we have 10,000 kids in school, well, that’s certainly an improvement." US

The US Embassy participant registered surprise at the BGMEA’s cooperation:
“What surprised me was the extent to which the garment industry really cooperated in good faith.” He also stressed the distrust the BGMEA had of AAFLI.

“It was just too difficult to get the BGMEA to sign any agreement that AAFLI was also a signatory to; there’s too much distrust. The BGMEA doesn’t particularly like people trying to organize unions in their factories. That is typical of non-organized industries. That was also the case in the United States.”

US

It appeared to the US Embassy official that on paper “the MOU document seems to have all the bases covered.” He added that the garment industry has had a tremendous impact on society as women are earning a salary and gaining a certain amount of freedom and independence.

“The garment industry is notoriously portable and transient, especially if you’ve got problems like political instability, or real problems with child labour, you can always pick up and move somewhere else. I hope that doesn’t happen in Bangladesh because the garment industry has had a tremendous social impact. It has given women the chance to get out of the house and work and earn a salary and young single women the chance to get out of the house and work and earn a salary and some freedom so they don’t have to get married so soon.”

US

It was his opinion that the nation must become richer in order to deal effectively with child labour, and that child labour happens at the early stage of any
nation's development. The US Embassy participant was not convinced that the MOU would rid the garment industry of child labour.

"The biggest constraint is poverty. So in the broader sense when the United States says its main goal is to promote democracy and economic development, the only way we are going to be able to tackle the broader problem of child labour effectively is if the country gets richer. Child labour happens at early stages of industrial development, because countries are poor. It happened in our country, it happened in other countries. But that's not an excuse for saying so we'll just have to let it go on, but we need to tackle the problem in the context of promoting economic development. If kids are going to keep working, the country is going to stay poor." US

The Critics

6.8 Asian-American Free Labour Institute (AAFLI) Participant.

The AAFLI representative I interviewed asked that parts of our interview be removed from the transcripts because of the sensitive nature of AAFLI-BGMEA relations, and the possible threats that may occur to certain labour lawyers and union members. The Bangladesh Independent Garment Workers Union (BIGWU) and its activities are supported by AAFLI. The BGMEA has no great affinity for AAFLI, particularly because they view the organization as an American union-friendly organization interfering in the garment industry. AAFLI is geared towards
implementing worker education and providing garment workers with their legal rights and entitlements and AAFLI views child labour as a symptom of a wider context of injustice.

"We look at child labour as a symptom of a broader problem of worker rights." AAFLI

The AAFLI Participant's impression was that the BGMEA that is, the owners and management, should be more accountable to the children.

"To make the MOU really successful you need good monitoring, to make sure that the factory owners are living up to their side of the agreement, and making sure that children don't slip through the cracks. My understanding is that until all these MOU schools are set up, no one is going to hold the owners accountable for anything." AAFLI

The AAFLI Participant made very clear her view that the BGMEA's involvement in the MOU was not because of humanitarian concerns; rather, they were motivated to participate in this program purely out of business reasons.

"I think the only reason the BGMEA is involved in the MOU is because it makes sense from a business perspective because it will put them in a positive light vis à vis their neighbours and competitors." AAFLI

The AAFLI Participant's sense of shock by the attitudes held by many
Bangladeshis that children are not all considered equal illustrated her somewhat naive notions of working in the area of children’s rights. It is relevant as no other participants reflected this rather innocent understanding of childhood in Bangladesh.

"I was really surprised by the reaction from many Bangladeshis that child labour is a necessary evil and that given their social and economic circumstances, these children don’t really have any other choice. Really treating these children as if they were not humans, as if they were another breed, another class, that really shocked me." AAFLI

Her major concerns about the MOU were the need for better outreach to the poor as to the value of education, and encouraging parents that it is not out of their class to desire education and value it. She was "appalled at how easy it is for the BGMEA to violate the terms of the MOU," by, for example, hiring new underage children and holding back pay cheques of those children who do join the MOU schools. She mentioned that "there is a crisis in education when parents do not want to send their children to free public schools." In addressing the aspect of unions, she mentioned how, in Bangladesh, trade unions are wings of political parties and that factory owners often threaten workers either to support or not support certain parties.
6.9 Save the Children Fund UK Participants

The SCF-UK office in Dhaka was well-known within the MOU circle as having been highly critical of the negotiation process. In particular, certain SCF-UK personnel were critical of the US Embassy’s role.

“I think what happened was that various interests including the American Embassy and UNICEF, recognizing the threat to a major Bangladeshi export, got together to try and protect the garment sector. I think education came up as a way to respond to the threat rather than part of the answer, it was part of the need.” SCF B

“It has been possible to provide education to the children using money coming from America which no doubt helps the American government say to its constituents that it’s helping working children and acting to find a solution and a bit of money from the garment sector which was more or less blackmailed out of them.” SCF B

They also believed that the MOU project was financially unsustainable.

“There’s too much money to be absorbed intelligently, and the voices that become louder because of this money might not be the right money.” SCF B

“If you want to call the MOU a solution to the child labour problem then fine, bring enough money for 20-30 million children in school and somehow find the ability to provide them with education, teachers, great, but how long are you going to pay for these 30 million children to go to school? “ SCF B
They did not oppose UNICEF’s mission, but in order for the MOU to be a success, they thought it needed to address children in the most hazardous occupations first. Both Save the Children Fund UK Participants believed that a strategy to deal with working children should start with the most desperate, not with those who have jobs, such as the garment workers.

“If I had the means, I would put a new dimension on the MOU and start with the worst form of child labour, so that once I stop, the children cannot go to more hazardous employment. They can only go to visible forms of labour, flushing it out from the bottom, the most exploitable.” SCF A

“If you look at what opportunities are available for child labourers it doesn’t make a whole lot of sense to me to target preferred opportunities for abolition or even for building on an approach that seeks to maximize good things and ignores problems.” SCF B

Participant SCF A agreed with the AAFLI representative that the MOU “left the manufacturers off too easily” and that the boycott threat meant that the BGMEA had no choice but to sign the MOU.

“I think the GOB was in a tight position; the MOU was the only thing they could do. The government is not in a position of strength, they are not talking from a position of equality, it’s a very unequal relationship, ‘unless you sign it we are not going to
buy from you. Under that threat what is your maneuvering space?" SCF A

Thus, according to Participant SCF A:

"The GOB was not in a position of strength - signifying an unequal relationship, whereby unless the GOB and the BGMEA agreed to the provisions of the MOU, the US would end all trade with Bangladesh."

Participant SCF A’s discussion of childhood and the attitudes of Bangladeshis towards child labour was very interesting. She stated that:

"Child labour is an attitudinal issue. It’s the whole attitude of people that these children are poor, the parents were poor. Why do they change their attitude when it comes to a child domestic than with their own child? It’s a very serious attitude problem, it is a completely blind belief. We don’t even see anything wrong with this relationship and my children are growing up seeing this." SCF A

Participant SCF A shared a fascinating insight into her personal journey as a child rights activist whereby she has been able to turn her traditional views regarding child labour around and make a commitment and contribution to working towards helping children employed as domestic servants.

"Like most people in the country, I was more or less oblivious to the whole child labour thing. I have seen children working in my house, my parents house, my in-laws’ house, everyone and it
didn't bother me because I grew up with it. That's why I think attitude is so important. I think living in the UK where I was a minority and being exposed to subtle racism was helpful." SCF A

"I had a child working in my house for three years and I was conscious all the time and I wanted to find out where I go wrong. I said I'd have to be a very kind person who doesn't abuse the child, who doesn't do this, who doesn't do that, but all the time I caught myself doing something and asking, why am I doing this? Why do I say that? certain things were in my control to do something about and others were beyond my control. I know it sounds like I was experimenting with the person but I was experimenting with the situation. I took total responsibility for that child, then I realized I cannot be a surrogate mother for her. That was three years of my life and I wouldn't do it again. It's a long time to be faced with all my inabilities. It's not beating, it's not verbal abuse, just the whole relationship was wrong. At least I'm honest to myself about this." SCF A

Her comments on how common the practice of employing child domestic servants is was useful in understanding this socio-cultural practice.

"Everybody has a child domestic in their house. It is not a class phenomenon. The very poor, even a servant working as an adult domestic worker in a house has a child domestic servant working in her house." SCF A

Participant SCF A believed that for 10,000 children to receive an education will have no effect on the overall problem of child labour: "it won't have any affect,
it will not spill over onto other children." She felt, as did the AAFLI representative that there is something wrong with bribing people for education. In addition, Participant SCF A felt that UNICEF was putting too much pressure on the MOU as a solution to child labour.

"UNICEF bullied everyone into it; there wasn’t any scope for negotiation. Probably it’s unfair to say that. UNICEF’s position on child labour was a bit unclear, because of the central directive. UNICEF is putting too much pressure on the MOU as a solution to child labour. We are saying that the way you are doing it will not get us anywhere, you are making the child’s conditions worse." SCF A

SCF A would have preferred to see pressure on the GOB by NGOs on all of the child labour problem, not just the garment sector. She viewed the MOU as "acting like a band-aid," not addressing the greater political problems.

Participant SCF B’s view of the MOU were very specific. He viewed the US Embassy and UNICEF as working together to protect the garment industry.

"The opportunity for the MOU came because garments are exported, lots of external interests. But the export sector is not the worst, in many ways it’s not the worst of opportunities, in many ways it’s the cause of more improvement in people’s lives." SCF B

"UNICEF was looking for a leverage point to do something about child labour, they saw this as a sort of win, win opportunity for a bit of good news. The US State Department were
embarrassed about the damage that AAFLI might do to the only bit of good economic news in Bangladesh.” SCF B

He mentioned the competitive nature of Bangladeshi society as exemplifying the vulnerability of falling from one class to another, with no safety nets, which may explain why the private sector was not as cooperative as had been hoped.

“This is an extremely competitive society: talk about vulnerability throughout it, there’s always the vulnerability of falling from one class to another, in fact very possibly being pushed from one to another, very little possibility of being helped back up again.” SCF B

The US involvement on the part of Senator Harkin, was viewed by Participant SCF B as helping American politicians appear to their constituents as if they are dealing with the situation of child labour.

“ It has been possible to provide education to the children using money coming from America which no doubt helps the American government say to its constituents that it’s helping working children and acting to find a solution and a bit of money from the garment sector which was more or less blackmailed out of them.” SCF B

Due to the competitive nature of the development business, Participant SCF B viewed the involvement of BRAC and GSS in the MOU as obvious because they
were in a position where they had to agree to contract out their services. According to the SCF B representative:

"The BGMEA, I don’t think, had any choice. I think they grasped the straw that was offered to them, to save themselves from the threat." SCF B

According to Participant SCF B, the MOU’s conception of childhood is a Victorian, sentimental view of childhood, but it is not how childhood is viewed in Bangladeshi culture.

"We’re using Western concepts of childhood which are quite recent in the West. The Victorian sentimental view of childhood has emerged and this still seems to be a major influence on the dominant model of how development practitioners see childhood. We know it’s more complicated than that, that context is extremely important." SCF B

Participant SCF B’s major concern about the MOU was that approaching children in the garment sector is not a constructive approach to the problem of child labour in Bangladesh. He believed that in order for the MOU to become successful;

"The MOU has to come from within the society, because there has to be real commitment to implementing it and real commitment to goals, the reason behind it, otherwise as with any other policy, the goal will be missed and no one will even care."
All in all, Participant SCF B felt that the MOU would not be the answer to ending child labour in Bangladesh, rather the need was to concentrate on the worst forms of child labour. He stated that the education system has problems with quality, access, relevance, and motivation, and that there is little contact between the education sector and the people they are serving. He regarded the "MOU in a test tube form" as acceptable, but insufficient.

"The MOU is fine in its test tube form, but one thing is very clear that the MOU is not at all sustainable, it's actually very expensive and relies on forces and money from outside Bangladesh." SCF B

His additional concern was with respect to the behaviour of donors in Bangladesh who appear to set the agendas, provide the expertise and then turn around and say that Bangladesh needs to be more democratic.

**Concluding Remarks**

Detailed interviews with key participants and critics of the MOU permit the sketching of a number of conclusions. One of the major communication gaps in the MOU process is the monitoring role of ensuring that the children leave the factories and enter into educational programs, not other employment. According to the
MOU, the implementers of the MOU schools projects - BRAC and GSS - do not have direct contact with the factories which allows for serious communication gaps which have developed between the children, the factory management and the schools. The ILO supposedly has this direct communication link with the factories, but is only able to monitor the factory side of the project. The reverse is true when we consider that BRAC and GSS monitor only the school program. The problem is that no responsible agency is tasked to coordinate the leap between factory and school at the operational level. UNICEF's role is at the management level and it is not well enough known at the community, grass-roots level to perform this much needed coordination function.

Domestic political factors have directly affected the policy making and implementation stages of the MOU, considering the delays in school openings, and conflict between the BGMEA and one of the implementing agencies - Gonoshahajjo Sangstha. UNICEF is seen as shouldering most of the effort to educate these children and in the context of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, their "rights approach" towards keeping the best interests of the child at heart has meant that their new-found leadership is increasingly a political one. The ILO's verification and monitoring role reflects the interests of its tripartite interest groups; employers, employees and governments, and ultimately limits its effectiveness in targeting the issue. The structure of the BGMEA reveals that the executive membership is dedicated to this program, but that the individual garment factory owners have no great interest in the future prospects for their smallest workers.
The financial sustainability of the stipend disbursements - one of the main features of the MOU schools project - is of major concern, as the goal and objectives of the MOU are externally valued and not of chief importance to the actual implementers of the program.

The main criticisms of the program are that garment children should not be the first target group of children as the conclusion is that they are the lucky ones and their situation can get worse, and that the MOU schools should be addressing the needs of children in the most hazardous and exploitative occupations such as child prostitution, the invisible informal sector, and child domestic servants. The designers of the MOU are aware of these criticisms, yet it continues to be touted as an emerging solution to phase out child labour in the garment sector and funds are being rounded up in the United States and abroad by private donors to further the need to address these children. It is premature at this stage to give a definitive evaluation of the program, but without sustained commitment and education of the BGMEA and the parents themselves, the MOU schools may not be as great a success story as it is being sold.

In presenting the data, I have attempted to respect the principles of samaj, but also indicate that without a change to the foundations of samaj, child labour will continue. It remains a highly complicated and delicate issue with an increasingly important international aspect and resonance. What I have managed to summarize in my analysis is what my participants shared with me and their concerns about a program that endeavours to provide education for a select group of child garment
workers.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Future Concerns and Concluding Remarks

“One of the biggest barriers which must be removed is the doubt that things are possible for working children in Bangladesh. What we need is a growing movement of people who believe it is possible to end child labour before poverty is ended.” UNICEF Participant B

In this thesis I have approached two kinds of analyses. The first section is a study of the literature and major debates regarding an anthropological understanding of childhood specific to Bangladeshi culture, an investigation into the political economy of the Bangladeshi garment industry, and an introduction to a child rights-based approach to development education. The second section is a qualitative research study of seventeen in-depth participant interviews with key members of the Memorandum of Understanding negotiation process.

In this closing chapter, I conclude the thesis by highlighting the key elements in each chapter and addressing the main concerns regarding the MOU which were alluded to in the introduction. These include the argument that the MOU is simply a reaction to improve public relations with respect to the garment industry, and the greater political interests at play in encouraging the private sector to become players in this project. In addition, there is the concern regarding the consequences of the apparent lack of GOB interest and support of the MOU.
Chapter one provided an examination into the methodology used in the structure, theory, and analysis of the research topic which is a qualitative study of the MOU schools project which is working towards eliminating child labour in the Bangladeshi garment industry. This chapter includes an assessment of my personal bias and a profile of the participants as well as a summary of the major themes found in the interview section of the thesis.

In Chapter two I have outlined an anthropological understanding of childhood and education within the cultural context of Bangladesh. The ineffective educational system, combined with severe economic hardship for urban slum children has forced young children into hazardous exploitative employment. Fortunately, the work of UNICEF and indigenous NGOs have been able to provide alternative non-formal basic education for children employed in the licensed garment factories.

Chapter three examined the root causes of child labour and investigated how child labour is part of a larger, complicated global economic trend of declining finances available for social development, and the regrettable reality of an increasingly competitive and oppressive market in the North for cheaper goods made by cheaper labour in the developing world.

Chapter four evaluated the reflections of a child's rights based approach to educational development suggesting that the UNCRC, although not perfect in accommodating the Bangladeshi-centric understanding of childhood, is nevertheless a dynamic approach towards initiating real benefits for working
Abolishing child labour in the export sector alone cannot contribute significantly to eliminating it across the country. Children in Bangladesh work because their families are poor and because there is no immediate prospect of eliminating child poverty. The MOU warns against simplistic a priori assumptions about children in the workplace and against taking action without anticipating its effects on the children involved, as was the case with the threat of the Harkin Bill. This significant agreement to end child labour also illustrates the need for a strong social commitment to establishing viable economic, educational and cultural development alternatives to child work.

Child labour in Bangladesh can be eliminated through strengthening the education system, by converting it from an important cause of the problem to an important element in its resolution. The non-formal primary education programs offered by BRAC and GSS are an indication of the success of low cost, yet high quality basic education. The continued efforts of the members of the MOU schools project show that more can be accomplished through corrective alternatives than through punitive sanctions. Even if the threat of sanctions is maintained as a motivating factor, time and resources are required to create mechanisms necessary to transition children into activities that will improve rather than worsen their life situation.

The thesis finds that the MOU schools reveal parallel trends in recent debates on international assistance generally. In the early 1990’s, the controversy over the
use of child labour in the garment industry, seen as either protectionist forces in the industrialized trade unions, unfair trade practices, or general humanitarian concerns, came to the forefront of trade debate as embodied in the G7 Summit’s reference to the “social clause” in trade sanctions. The international pressure on the Bangladeshi garment industry forced Bengali society and the government to address the situation of the thousands of child workers engaged in labour in garment factories. This has led to the opening up of discussions on child labour from an economic, political, social, and cultural perspective.

**Future Concerns**

The difficulties facing the MOU schools have been diagnosed in a variety of ways by the participants ranging from organizational differences evolving into inter-agency conflict, to questioning the availability of funding, to the psychological and attitudinal prejudices held by those in positions of authority with respect to child labour. Although many poor children do manage to stay in school, poverty remains the greatest enemy of education for children in Bangladesh. The MOU attempts to deal with the income requirements of working children, but it does not provide fully compensatory renumeration. Many questions remain about children who work and are not in the MOU schools. What claim do they have over resources ear-marked for child labourers? This will be one of the future fields of application of the MOU. Nevertheless, an important precedent has been created,
though perhaps for the present one limited to the export sector. The MOU does not require that poverty end before child labour does, rather it means that income substitution needs to be more innovatively and thoughtfully designed to assist the most marginalized.

It is interesting that bilateral donors and governments in various parts of the world have taken such a keen interest in the MOU. In Canada for example, the House of Commons debates in May 1996, cited the Bangladesh MOU example, and referred to the lives of children who had lost their jobs as a result of the threat of the Harkin Bill. For the present at least, the possibility of introducing similar legislation in Canada is remote. However, this does not mean that there is no reason to relax various campaigns under way to eliminate child labour. It simply illustrates that the MOU has given people and governments a reason to believe that alternatives to trade sanctions might both be feasible and effective.

This study has endeavoured to draw out the complexities surrounding the issues of child labour in Bangladesh. It has provided adequate background to this issue in terms of the major findings of social anthropology. It has studied various endogenous factors as well as one egregious exogenous input, viz the so-called Harkin Bill of 1993. Particular focus is placed on the UNCRC, its relevance to Bangladesh and its normative influence in regard to the child labour issues, especially in relation to the “best interests” clause. I conclude that normative universality of the UNCRC can neither be taken for granted nor abandoned, but that
achievements in the actual condition of child labour require following An-Na‘im, that the use of the Convention come from a diversity of perspectives including contestation, as well as interpretation and revision.

I have studied the MOU of 1993 in detail and provided an in-depth analysis of the motivations of the principal parties to it, especially of UNICEF itself, the largest and most important agency responsible for the world-wide elimination of child labour. The methodology of the paper is fully outlined, together with a detailed account of sources consulted, and interviewing techniques employed. My principal findings support the need to establish the programs developed in the 1993 MOU on a sustainable basis. To this end, commitments must be obtained from both foreign donors and from the Bangladeshi private sector. The project is simply unsustainable without these critical inputs - each of which is necessary, but neither of which is sufficient.

It is my view in this thesis that foreign buyers need to inform themselves of the larger issues connected to child labour, in order to transmit their concern both as feed-back to the Bangladeshi employers, and to increase consumer awareness of the issues in end-use countries. Finally, I conclude that in order to ensure the longer term success of the project, the Government of Bangladesh must be encouraged by all these parties, and other agencies supporting the cause of children in Bangladesh, to build upon the success of the MOU schools, and the model they represent, to expand educational coverage to meet the goal of “Education For All.”

Additional qualitative and quantitative work is required to determine the
extent of child labour in other sectors of the Bangladeshi economy, particularly in those sectors such as leatherwork, glasswork and construction which are known to be particularly hazardous to children. In addition, the application of the MOU should be studied in relation to child labourers in garment and other industries of other nations with similar socio-cultural indices elsewhere in South Asia and possibly Latin America.

Further discussion of the responsibilities of large foreign buyers that do business in Bangladesh, for example, Walmart, Zellers, the Hudson's Bay Company, and other garments importers, can now be explored more openly, in the light of the "success" of the MOU. The lessons learned from this thesis will make more people aware of the circumstances involved in educating child labourers, more sensitive to the complexities of the industry itself, and of the important anthropological differences in understanding childhood.
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Memorandum of Understanding between BGMEA, UNICEF, and ILO

Bangladesh regarding the Placement of child workers in school programmes and the elimination of child labour July 4, 1995


Research.


# APPENDIX

## List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAFLI</td>
<td>Asian-American Free Labour Institute</td>
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<td>BGMEA</td>
<td>Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>BIDS</td>
<td>Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRAC</td>
<td>Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
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<tr>
<td>GATT</td>
<td>General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs</td>
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<tr>
<td>GOB</td>
<td>Government of Bangladesh</td>
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<tr>
<td>GSS</td>
<td>Gonoshahajjo Sangstha</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOU</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>NFPE</td>
<td>Non-Formal Primary Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
between BGMEA, UNICEF and ILO Bangladesh
regarding the placement of child workers in school programmes
and the elimination of child labour
July, 4, 1995

PURPOSE
1. The purpose of this MOU is the removal of underaged children from BGMEA factories including subcontracting factories in Bangladesh, and their placement in appropriate education programmes.
2. The parties to this MOU request all appropriate continued cooperation from the Government of Bangladesh and the American Embassy in Bangladesh in achieving the purposes of this MOU which will be essential to its success.

INITIAL STEPS
3. Following a decision taken by BGMEA on 17 May 1995, BGMEA will establish 25 survey teams. The survey teams will begin work in July 1995, conducting an accurate census of underaged workers in all BGMEA factories. Representatives of UNICEF, the ILO, and the US Embassy in Bangladesh may accompany each team and participate in designing the methodology of the study. It is understood that no underaged workers be terminated before the survey can be completed. Upon signing the MOU, BGMEA will further request that no underaged worker will be terminated until the appropriate school programmes for the workers can be put in place. Funding for the survey will be provided by UNICEF and BGMEA.
4. The programme of transition from work to school will proceed as rapidly as it is possible for the appropriate school programmes to be arranged by the UNICEF
and ILO in co-operation with GOB. October 31, 1995 is the target date for all workers who have not attained 14 years of age to be terminated from employment and placed in school programmes to be funded by ILO and UNICEF, provided that children will not be terminated until such programmes are ready to absorb them.

5. No new child workers, who have not attained 14 years of age, will be hired by BGMEA member factories.

**EDUCATION**

6. BGMEA, UNICEF and ILO will make every effort to place as many underaged workers as possible in schools on or before 31 October 1995. UNICEF, BGMEA and ILO will work with the Government of Bangladesh on such programmes.

7. UNICEF will contribute US $175,000 in 1995, and additional support later, and BGMEA will contribute to the UNICEF sponsored school programme US $50,000 per year, towards the costs of educating underaged workers. Such ILO-IPEC funds as may be made available will also have education as an authorized use. The education programme will be arranged in consultation with the Primary and Mass Education Division of the Government of Bangladesh following the usual procedures.

**VERIFICATION**

8. The ILO will provide technical assistance and financial support of initially about US $250,000 for the verification programme or for other uses of ILO funds mentioned in this MOU, within the context of an action programme of the International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). This will be in addition to the normal allocation for IPEC. The ILO will help devise a
labour inspection system in co-operation with the GOB which would ascertain that the terms of this MOU are observed. Such verification may involve unannounced factory visits. The ILO will work with the GOB as well as with the Steering Committee established in paragraph 13 below to resolve implementation issues. ILO assistance with verification in co-operation with the GOB is expected to continue for at least two years.

**INCOME MAINTENANCE**

9. The programme intends to provide stipends to terminated child workers attending school programmes at a rate of Taka 300 per month. The ILO will contribute a portion of the funds under the expanded IPEC action programme, for the provision of stipends. BGMEA will contribute 50 percent of the cost of such stipends up to a maximum of US $250,000 per year for three years. If necessary, BGMEA, UNICEF, and ILO will call on private contributors in Bangladesh and abroad, other international organizations, as well as governments and foundations, to provide the balance of stipends requirements.

10. BGMEA undertakes to offer employment to qualified family members of underaged workers whose employment will be terminated under this programme. This information will be sought during the survey.

11. The parties to the MOU will explore possibilities to arrange for food supplementation programmes for terminated workers who are placed in schools.

12. In addition to in-school stipends and allowances, the parties recognize there is a need for the provision of other income-generation opportunities after school to occupy children’s time productively and prevent an income loss. UNICEF and ILO will work towards these ends.
LOCAL INFORMAL STEERING COMMITTEE

13. The undertakings and programmes of BGMEA, UNICEF and ILO in this MOU will be coordinated through a local, informal steering committee. The parties invite the Government of Bangladesh and the US Embassy in Dhaka to participate in meetings of the steering committee. This Steering Committee will deal with such issues as may arise during the implementation of this MOU for example, resolving cases in which termination of underaged workers is not being implemented in accordance with this MOU; ensuring the monitoring of school attendance, stipend distribution, food supplementation; and other programmes established pursuant to this MOU. Any of the participants in the Steering Committee may call for a Steering Committee meeting.

14. BGMEA, UNICEF and ILO, anticipating the participation of other parties, will take steps to create positive public awareness with respect to issues of child labour and education. They will also provide information on the rationale behind this MOU, and explain and endorse this agreement with interested groups. In particular, BGMEA will work through its business networks, UNICEF through its National Committees and the ILO through its IPEC programme. The parties hope that the Government of Bangladesh and the American Embassy in Bangladesh will assist in these efforts.

FUTURE

15. Should relevant changes in the law/labour code be made in the future, the MOU may be amended appropriately to reflect such changes.
Appendix C

Interview Questions

I. Official Responsibilities, program execution of MOU. Background
1. Could you describe your position in your organization in relation to the MOU project?
2. Could you describe the MOU process as it came to be?
3. What is your educational background?
4. How long have you been involved in the MOU project?
5. Who defines child labour as what kind of problem?

II. Motivation of self and self-assessment of work in MOU project
1. How do you define your goals for this MOU project?
2. How do you cope with the reality that child labour will continue despite the MOU and your efforts?
3. Why are you involved in this process?
4. Do you employ child domestic staff in your home?
5. What has surprised you about the MOU project and how has this changed your motivation?
6. What are your responses to and interpretations of the MOU?
7. What is your understanding of a workable solution towards educating child garment workers?

III. Motivation of other partners and assessment of other players work
1. How well motivated are the other participants in the MOU?
2. What is their motivation?
3. How do the other players view your organizations' efforts?
4. How do you view the GOB as participating in the struggle to educate child garment workers?
5. At this point in the process which organization bears prime responsibility for the execution of the MOU and in your opinion are they doing a good job?

IV. Assessment of project as a whole
1. What are the barriers which if removed could lead to more effective child labour policy outcomes and more effective measures to ensure child workers have access to and use of schools?
2. How has work on educational projects for children in the garment industry added to theory, policy, and practice in the area of children's rights?
3. Why is the program working?
4. Why is the program not working?
5. What were and what are the essentials for the implementation of the MOU?
6. How many schools are there presently and how many children are being served?
7. What are the consequences of these educational programs for child garment workers?

V. International Ramifications
1. In your view what are the international effects of the MOU project?
2. How does the Dhaka MOU fit into the world view of child labour and education?
3. The UNCRC being a "Northern" concept, does this make it difficult to ensure the protection of child rights in Bangladesh?
Appendix D
Letter of Consent

Suzanne Scott
Masters Student in Education
18 (CWS) Gulshan Avenue
Dhaka
PH. 604.944

Dear Participant,

My name is Suzanne Scott and I am a Masters student in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) in Toronto, Canada. I am conducting interviews for my Masters thesis research. My research question is “What do you view as a workable program to educate child labourers?” I am aware that BRAC and UNICEF are engaged in many projects to educate marginalised children in Bangladesh. I am interested in conducting an interview on how you view your work in this field.

Your identity will remain confidential throughout the research process. Should you feel uncomfortable about a question, or prefer not to have your interview taped please feel free to let me know. I am taking a participatory approach whereby we are helping each other learn in the process. The interviews will take about one hour to one and a half hours. If you wish to stop during the interview please feel free to do so. If you want to withdraw from the research you can do so at any time and all tapes and data will be destroyed.

After I have completed my Masters thesis I will be pleased to send you a copy of
my completed thesis. You are most welcome to contact me at any time at the above phone number. I will be in Dhaka until the 17th of August.

If you are agree to participating in my research, would you please sign your name at the bottom of the letter.

Thank you very much for your interest and support,

Yours sincerely, Suzanne Scott

_________________________________________  __________
Signature of Participant                      Date

_________________________________________  __________
Signature of Researcher                      Date